

Empowerment of youth through strengthening their land rights knowledge and research capacity: evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa

By

Uchendu Eugene Chigbu¹, Agatha Wanyonyi² and Danilo Antonio²

1. Chair of Land Management, Technical University of Munich, Germany

2. Land and GLTN Unit UN-HABITAT, Kenya

Abstract

Africa is a continent of youth. However, its high rates of youth unemployment linked to high levels of landlessness suggest a close correlation with youth poverty and access to land. This paper presents the perspective of an approach for capacitating youth through research on land and natural resource tenure in Eastern and Southern Africa. The capacity development effort involved action research initiated by the Global Land Tool Network (through Association of African Planning Schools) with youth researchers to conduct research and produce country reports on land and natural resource tenure. How this approach paved the way to empowerment of the youth—through strengthening their land rights knowledge and research capacity—is the focus of this paper.

Keywords: Africa, land governance, natural resources, research, tenure security, tenure studies, land tenure, youth empowerment, youth research

1. Introduction

There is a need for better use and management of land/natural resources in Africa. This need arises because of the essential roles land (and other land-based natural resources) play in reducing poverty, creating social inclusion and promoting economic development. However, land/natural resources are becoming increasingly scarce in Africa because of climate change, natural disasters and increasing population pressure (UN-Habitat/GLTN, 2019). Across Africa, there is a need to understand the changing contexts of land/natural resource tenure to improve strategies and approaches towards pro-poor land/natural resource management. This is important because any sustainable pathway to Africa's transformation requires population-wide improvement in the "access to knowledge and information on land policymaking and implementation" (African Land Policy Centre, 2019: 2). This will ensure that Africa's land tenure systems desist from underperforming to the benefits of its very few elites (Chigbu et al., 2019). It also requires that mechanisms for land access by vulnerable groups include the needs of the youth (AUC-ECA-AfDB Consortium, 2010). Improving the research capacity of the African youth (on land governance) should be a priority because "good quality research on land is essential for the contextualisation, analysis, and understanding of key land issues" (Africa Land Policy Initiative, 2016: 51).

Africa is a continent of youth. However, "high rates of youth unemployment linked to high levels of landlessness suggest a close correlation with youth poverty and access to land" in the continent (Sait et al., 2007: 2). Therefore, it is essential to engage the African youth in the knowledge building and creativity necessary to rapidly transform the continent's land situations. This means changing the attitudes toward tackling Africa's land challenges, especially by improving youth research capacities in the continent. Research capacity in this context is the ability to identify land/natural

resource problems; set priorities to tackle them, and conduct relevant scientific research to understand and develop lasting solutions to improve those problems (Chigbu et al., 2019). Developing the capacity to conduct and publish research outputs is a vital prerequisite for building and disseminating knowledge necessary for addressing existing and emerging land governance challenges in Africa.

This paper focuses on efforts at developing the land rights knowledge and research capacity of youth to enable them further land/natural resource tenure security in the Eastern and Southern (ESA) Africa. The paper begins by creating an understanding of capacity development in the context of youth capacitation in research. This is followed by recognising what land means to the youth. It then presents the procedures involved in carrying out the paper (methodology). This is then followed by the outcome of the capacity development process, and then followed by some emerging issues and conclusion.

2. Understanding capacity development in the context of African youth

Capacity development is “the continual and comprehensive learning and change processes by which African governments, organisations and people identify, strengthen, adapt, create and retain the needed capacity for effective development, implementation and tracking for the resolution of priority land challenges facing the continent” (Haile et al., 2013: 3). It entails the development of knowledge, skills and talent of youth towards a specific aspect of human endeavour. In the context of this paper, this entails systematic knowledge enquiry, locally based knowledge building and network enabled transfer of skills in land and natural resource research. Capacity development, as has been used in this paper, is considered to be a development issue. It is a means of capacitation. This is because, in the context of Africa, capacity development is a type or form of development. It is a term that emphasises learning or knowledge sharing or production at an advanced level. In this case, at university research level (including undergraduate and graduate levels). The potential returns of capturing the opportunity to engage today’s youth in the challenge of promoting land/natural resource tenure can have a multiplier effect on knowledge base for ensuring “food security, poverty reduction, employment generation, as well as peace and political stability” (FAO et al., 2013: 4).

3. Recognising what land means to the youth

The *African Youth Charter*¹ defines “youth or young people” to be “every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years”. Also, the *African Union Constitutive Act* and the *African Union Commission strategic Plan 2004-2007* give due priority to youth development and empowerment” (African Union Commission, 2006). These African Union initiatives recognise the mandatory nature of youth participation in the development of Africa. Investing in the development of youth capacity in land tenure research is becoming ever more important as the challenges associated with improving youth access to land and securing their tenure security are growing. Ensuring that the youth are not left behind in the effort at improving land access and securing tenure demand innovations. It also demands that the youth develop tenure awareness and the knowledge (and skills) necessary for promoting better use and management of land/natural resources. Given

¹ The Charter prescribes responsibilities to Member States for the development of youth. It was adopted during the Seventh Ordinary Session of the Conference of Heads of States and Government held on 2nd July, 2006 in Banjul, The Gambia.

these situations, it is important that the research capacity needs of young people in the aspects of tenure is improved.

“Land has more than a material or utilitarian aspect for youth. For many, their relationship with land is intertwined with their pursuit of identity, community and cultural expression. Socio-cultural meaning of land varies across the diverse categories of youth. It has a different meaning depending if you are a young man or woman; if it is customary or indigenous land it is imbued with sacred or cultural dimensions and land means fundamentally different things to the young farmer, pastoralist or urban dweller. Youth are one of the largest demographics within numerous if not all vulnerable groups such as refugees, widows, street youth, HIV positive and orphans” (Sait et al. 2007: 2).

This paper considers one crucial way to recognise what land means to the youth to be by developing their capacity in land and natural resource tenure. This is in accordance with prescription of the *African Youth Charter* which states that:

“Every young person shall be entitled to the enjoyments of the rights and freedoms... State parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that youth are protected against all forms of discrimination on the basis of status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs... Every young person shall have the right to own and to inherit property... States Parties shall ensure that young men and young women enjoy equal rights to own property” (African Union Commission, 2006: 13-15).

The African youth (especially those studying and working in academic institutions in Africa) can play a crucial role as agents “for knowledge creation and sharing in land management education and research” (Chigbu et al., 2018: 4). If their capacities in researching land issues become well developed, they can form a networks of experts who will take up the responsibility of managing the future land resources of Africa (Chigbu et al., 2017).

4. Methodology

In order to strengthen land/natural resources tenure security in International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) supported projects in the ESA region, IFAD entered into a partnership with the GLTN in 2011, to implement the *Land and Natural Resources Tenure Security Learning Initiative for Eastern and Southern Africa* (TSLI-ESA) initiative. This paper derives from the TSLI-ESA experience, which was facilitated by IFAD, Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN). For details on TSLI-ESA initiative, see Chigbu et al. (2018). TSLI-ESA Intervention was based on a theory of change (impact pathway) that recognises “awareness raising, learning and understanding of the range of tenure risks that the project beneficiaries are exposed to, the effects of these risks on the project outcomes, and the knowledge about the tools and approaches available to address the tenure risks, will motivate staff and partners of IFAD-supported projects to acquire skills to use the available tools” (Chigbu et al., 2018: 9).

The paper presents the perspective of an approach for capacitating of youth through research in land and natural resource tenure. It is based on country case studies ($n=15$) conducted by youth researchers ($n=21$) from ESA. The youth (who researched these case studies) were purposively selected from the result of a call put forth by the GLTN Secretariat (through the AAPS) for cases focused on researching the status of land

and natural resource tenure in the ESA region. The call, which intentionally targeted youth researchers motivated to develop their knowledge and research skills to further land (and natural resource) tenure in their countries, was also advertised on *LinkedIn* by a consultant of the GLTN.

Over 75 researchers (and 17 ESA countries) responded to the call with the intent to conduct case study on their countries. Of the 21 youth selected, 10 are females and 11 males. Out of the 17 case studies received, 15 were accepted for publications. The 15 countries include Angola, Botswana, Burundi, eSwatini (Swaziland), Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The youth co-researched 7 of the case studies. Co-researching allowed them to test and improve their team-working skills, facilitate intra knowledge transfer (and learning) among the youth, as well as enabled them to network with each other. Attention was given to gender, particularly to ensure that women youth are armed with knowledge necessary for promoting women’s tenure security in ESA (see UN-Habitat, 2008; GLTN and IFAD, 2013; Chigbu, 2015; GLTN, 2018; Chigbu, 2019a-b; UN-Habitat/GLTN, 2019).

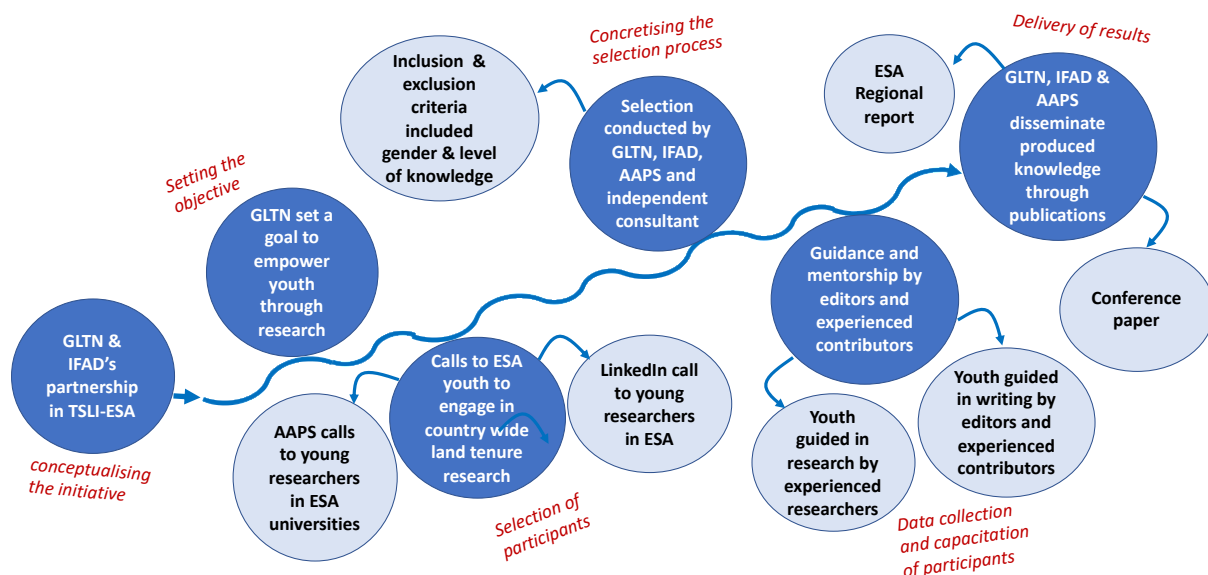


Figure 1: The research process showing different steps taken in conducting the study

Refer to Figure 1 for a general understanding of the process engaged during the capacity development initiative. In general, selection (or inclusion) of youth (gender aside) was also based on the criteria of informed academic or professional expertise (or knowledge) in land and natural resource tenure in ESA. It involved stakeholder consultations, desktop research, field observation and data collection followed by analysis and preparation of country reports. The youth were tasked to examine the current status of land/natural resources tenure security in the selected countries with a focus on the following:

- Identify country-specific policies, laws, and regulations that define access and tenure security for land/natural resources.
- Investigate country-specific strategies and approaches that have been used to address land and natural resource tenure security challenges in individual countries.
- Draw country-specific lessons from the projects investigated.
- Identify the areas of potential knowledge transfer for improved land and natural resource tenure.

The relevance of engaging African youth researchers to conduct these tenure studies is vital because their findings reflect a perspective of African youth on critical tenure issues in ESA.

5. Critical learning and knowledge outcomes from engaging the youth in land tenure research

Youth research capacity development was considered as an important empowerment tool by the GLTN. A key output of this youth research initiatives is that it provided evidence of what land means to the youth in Africa (land means different things to women, youth and men in Africa). It also produced insights into the current state of land and natural resource tenure, which resulted in an ESA regional report on land and natural resource tenure, entirely authored by (and from the perspective of) African youth. The new knowledge base from this youth research culminated into the development of a generic tool for land and natural resource tenure intervention for projects at the ESA country level. The experience presented in this paper represents key outcomes of the youth engagement and the ESA youth's perspectives of a sustainable pathway for Africa's transformation (and other issues emerging from the initiative). The following issues are notably important.

5.1 Engaging youth in tenure research projects to strengthen their land rights knowledge

Capacity building and development has been a key instrument in development. The challenge has been about its effectiveness and long-term sustainability. The GLTN (and its partners) envisaged the TSLI-ESA as a mix of capacity strengthening activities planned around progression towards the established ESA development goals.

A research occurs when individuals conduct investigations that makes an original contribution to land and natural resource studies. By engaging the youth in country based research on land and natural resource tenure, they engaged in direct (hands on) research through desktop investigations and fieldworks in IFAD project areas to answer some critical questions regarding land and natural resource tenure in ESA.

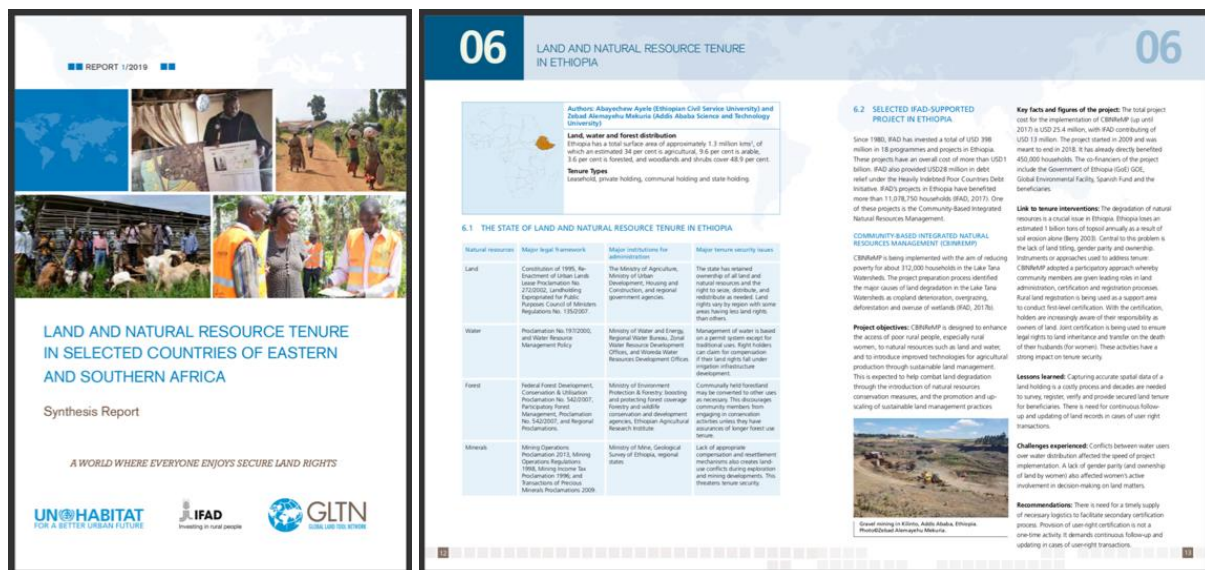


Figure 2: Screenshot of parts of the synthesis report authored by ESA youth researchers

The research questions investigated by the youth include: what is the status of land and natural resource tenure in specific ESA countries? How has IFAD-supported projects influenced land and natural resource tenure in specific areas in ESA countries? The AAPS organized the implementation of the youth research and writing project which led to the publication of a book (technical report) that explores the status of land and natural resource tenure in 15 ESA countries. The synthesis report (Figure 2) assesses and addresses issues of land and natural resource tenure in 15 ESA countries where government, civil society, the private sector and development cooperation interventions have been implemented over several decades.

The different country case studies represent the same geographic region in Africa, but with different socio-economic statuses. Many of the 15 ESA countries have completely restructured or reformed their regulatory and legal framework related to land/natural resources in recent decades. They have also tried to harmonize modern statutory laws with customary laws. Despite these efforts, land and natural resource tenure problems (including lack of access to land, social exclusion and insecurity of tenure) persist in these countries. The report addresses these issues and allows for comparison between the ESA countries. This will be helpful for practitioners and students of land-related disciplines and researchers to better grasp the complexities of dealing with land and natural resource tenure in ESA countries.

The youth report specifically contributes to the ongoing frameworks for securing tenure in Africa and has been produced as part of the TSLI-ESA knowledge management platform. It is aimed at those people working on IFAD and GLTN-supported projects in ESA, many of whom face issues and challenges in fully understanding the status of land and natural resource tenure in countries in the region. Each section of the report provides important land and natural resource tenure data on each of the specific countries, and the final section includes analyses of the cases presented and a way forward. Most important to this engagement is that it has allowed the youth to understand the land (and natural resource) tenure better than before. Hence, the youth voices have become louder and their perspectives of land and natural resource tenure in 15 ESA countries have become documented for the global community.

5.2 Youth voices and their perspectives of land and natural resource tenure in 15 ESA countries: outlook of tenure challenges

From the synthesis of the youth's perspective of the status of land and natural resource tenure in the selected ESA countries, some notable inferences emerged. As published in the report, "There is also increasing competition over land/natural resources due to widening margins of competing land uses and land conflicts, and the implication of these pressures is that customary systems of land tenure are frequently challenged. This leads, in turn, to land and natural resource tenure insecurity..." (Chigbu et al., 2019). An emerging issue from the findings of the youth is that tenure trends in all the countries highlight why countries have different approaches to land and natural resource tenure. All the countries, with the exception of Ethiopia which has no colonial experience, are either in the process of phasing out colonial legal systems or are having discussions towards phasing them out. The youth voices and their perspectives of land and natural resource tenure in 15 ESA countries are best understood from the outlook of challenges presented in Figure 3.

Eastern and Southern African Countries	Land and natural resource tenure challenges											Type of tenure*				
	Overlapping Legal frameworks	Legal pluralism	Weak institutional framework	Gender Inequality	Tenure Insecurity	Land/natural resource conflicts	Lack of participation	Evictions	Weak conflict resolution mechanisms	Corruption	Statutory	Customary	Public	Religious	Informal	
Angola	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Botswana	X	X	X	√	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Burundi	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Ethiopia	X	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Kenya	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Lesotho	X	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Madagascar	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Malawi	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Mozambique	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Namibia	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Rwanda	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	√	
Swaziland	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Tanzania	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Uganda	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Zambia	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	
Zimbabwe	√	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	

*The current land and natural resource tenure situation: X: No √: Yes

Figure 3: ESA tenure challenges from youth perspective (UN-Habitat/GLTN, 2019: 42)

Lessons (based on land and natural resource tenure project experiences) documented by the youth from their study of IFAD-supported projects indicate the following:²

- Land, water, minerals, forests, rangelands, wetlands and wildlife resources are the most important sources of livelihoods and food security.
- The poorest people are usually the most tenure insecure or landless individuals.
- Lack of access to land and insecure land tenure rights often result in entrenched poverty, creating impediments to food security.
- Improved access to land allows families to increase household food consumption, thereby helping to ensure household food security.
- Improved access to land enables households to gain more income by producing surplus for market sales, and widening options for households to access credit.
- Secure access to natural resources often provides a valuable safety net as a source of shelter, food and income in times of hardship.
- Land rights usually include collective rights held by social groups and rights of access to common property resources.
- The distribution of land/natural resources is closely related to distribution of livelihood options and welfare.

² Also refer to the original publication, entitled “Land and Natural Resource Tenure in Selected Countries of Eastern And Southern Africa” authored by the 21 youth researchers and edited by Chigbu et al. (2019).

- Poor infrastructure, informational asymmetries and seasonality in rain-fed agriculture all contribute to the weaknesses in agricultural sector investment programmes.
- Poverty reduction is impossible in the long term unless consideration is given to land/natural resources and the environment that people depend on for their livelihoods, health and survival.
- Understanding and adapting the traditional knowledge and indigenous practices of local communities are sometimes essential in making innovations in agricultural sector investment interventions.

5.3 Identifying and disseminating innovative approaches used to improve land and natural resource tenure in ESA

The youth research provided evidence of the recognition of the role of innovative approaches in improving the management of land and natural resources in IFAD's projects. The publication that emerged from the research helped to disseminate these approaches to practitioners in the area. In the analysis of selected IFAD supported projects in ESA, innovative instruments or approaches used to address tenure were identified. Some of the strategies identified include:

- **Capacity building:** IFAD used capacity building and development as a core strategy in educating populations in its project areas on the linkages between land and natural resource tenure security and their livelihood challenges.
- **Mapping and documentation:** IFAD used mapping in its projects to enhance, and improve accuracy in land information.
- **Alternative means of tenure:** De facto tenure security caused by land and natural resources inventories and documentation provided alternative means of tenure.
- **Gender/women's empowerment:** Safeguarding the natural resources on which vulnerable communities depend (by giving priority to the needs of women and women-headed households as means of empowerment) was a key to improving livelihoods in IFAD projects.
- **Conflict resolution and institutional strengthening:** Land conflict resolution was used to ensure tenure security. This was applied to strengthen institutions and policy dialogues to ensure that stakeholders respect decisions made during resolutions.

For details of all strategies and as they relate to specific ESA countries, see UN-Habitat/GLTN (2019).

6. Empowerment implications of strengthening youth's land rights knowledge and research capacity

Just as in general education, capacity development about research on land is central to evidence-based development and the improvement of the lives of communities in the ESA. Capacitating the youth is also a priority aspect in achieving internationally agreed development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Programme of Action for Youth.

The youth (girls and boys inclusive) who learn to investigate (or research) land/resources tenure challenges are important for ensuring a better future for their communities and countries. With improved education or capacity development in land

issues, so many benefits (social, economic and environmental) will be achieved in the regional land sectors.



Figure 4: Impacts of strengthening youth's land rights knowledge and research capacity

Figure 4 shows how the capacitation of youth by empowering them with land rights knowledge (and improving research capacity) can have social, economic and environmental benefits in the ESA region.

7. Conclusion

When IFAD and GLTN entered into a partnership for TSLI-ESA in 2011, their major objectives were threefold. (1) Raise awareness of land/natural resource tenure in ESA, document and share tenure issues and tools used to address them. (2) Develop the capacity of IFAD staff and partners to address tenure issues in ESA. And (3), support selected IFAD-supported investment projects and implement the tools necessary to address tenure security challenges being experienced in these project areas. The GLTN extended the capacity develop aspects of these objectives to the empowerment of youth through strengthening their land rights knowledge and research capacities. This approach was based on a long term strategy to ensure that the ESA youth are well capacitated to participate in improving the land/natural resource tenure challenges they

face in their regions. It was also based on winning the fight against corruption in the ESA land sector by ensuring that the ESA youth gain the globally accepted principles and ethics around land management practices. Based on the experience from the TSLI-ESA initiative, this paper concludes that engaging the youth in research is vital for building an African-centred knowledge on land governance; and enhancing locally-driven research and improving Africa's research capacity in scientific knowledge on land. It also empowers them with land/natural resource knowledge on Africa. This also includes the "know-how" on research writing, inter-African research collaborations; and learning through networking, and knowledge production and dissemination.

8. References

- African Land Policy Centre. (2019). *Winning the fight against corruption in the land sector: sustainable pathway for Africa's transformation*. ALPC Conference Leaflet.
- African Land Policy Initiative. (2016). *Guidelines for the development of the curricula on land governance in Africa*. African Land Policy Initiative: Addis Ababa.
- African Union Commission. (2006). *African Youth Charter*. African Union Commission: Addis Ababa.
- African Union Commission, Economic Commission for Africa & African Development Bank (AUC-ECA-AfDB Consortium). (2010). *Land Policy in Africa: A Framework to Strengthen Land Rights, Enhance Productivity and Secure Livelihoods*. AUC-ECA-AfDB Consortium: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Chigbu UE. (2019a). Anatomy of women's landlessness in the patrilineal customary land tenure systems of sub-Saharan Africa and a policy pathway. *Land Use Policy*, 86, pp. 126-135.
- Chigbu UE. (2019b). Masculinity, men and patriarchal issues aside: How do women's actions impede women's access to land? Matters arising from a peri-rural community in Nigeria. *Land Use Policy*, 81: pp. 39-48
- Chigbu, UE. (2015). Repositioning culture for development: women and development in a Nigerian rural community. *Community, Work & Family*, 18(3), 336-352.
- Chigbu, UE., Paradza, G. & Mwesigye, SP. (2019). *The Land Research Capacity of Africa: New Research Centre Concept For Catalysing Improved Land Governance*. World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, Washington DC, March 25-29.
- Chigbu UE., de Vries WT., Duran DP., Schopf A. & Bendzko T. (2018). *Advancing collaborative research in responsible and smart land management in and for Africa: The ADLAND model*. World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, March 19 - 23, Washington DC.
- Chigbu, UE., Wanyonyi, A., Achungo, B., Mkumbwa, S., Sylla, O. and Liversage, H. (2018). *Capacity development lessons from tenure security learning initiative in Eastern and Southern Africa (TSLI-ESA)*. World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, Washington DC, March 19-23.
- Food and Agricultural Organisation, International Fund for Agricultural Development & World Food Programme. (2013). *Developing the knowledge, skills and talent of youth to further food security and nutrition*. IFAD: Rome.
- Global Land Tool Network – GLTN. (2018). *Global Land Tool Network (GLTN): Strategy 2018 – 2030*. Nairobi, Kenya: UNON.
- UN-Habitat/GLTN. (2013). *Land and natural resources tenure security learning initiative for East And Southern Africa (TSLI-ESA) – phase 1 Achievements, lessons learned and way forward*. Nairobi, Kenya: UNON.

- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2019) *Land and Natural Resources Tenure in Selected Countries of Eastern and Southern Africa: Synthesis Report*. UN-Habitat: Nairobi.
- Haile S., Tempra, O. and Sietchping, R. (2013). *Towards a capacity development framework for land policy in Africa*. International Federation of Surveyors: Copenhagen.
- Sait, S., Pedersen, TI. & Solberg, J. (2007). *What land means to youth*. Global Land Tool Network / UN-Habitat: Nairobi.
- UN-Habitat. (2008). *Secure land right for all*. Nairobi, Kenya: UNON.