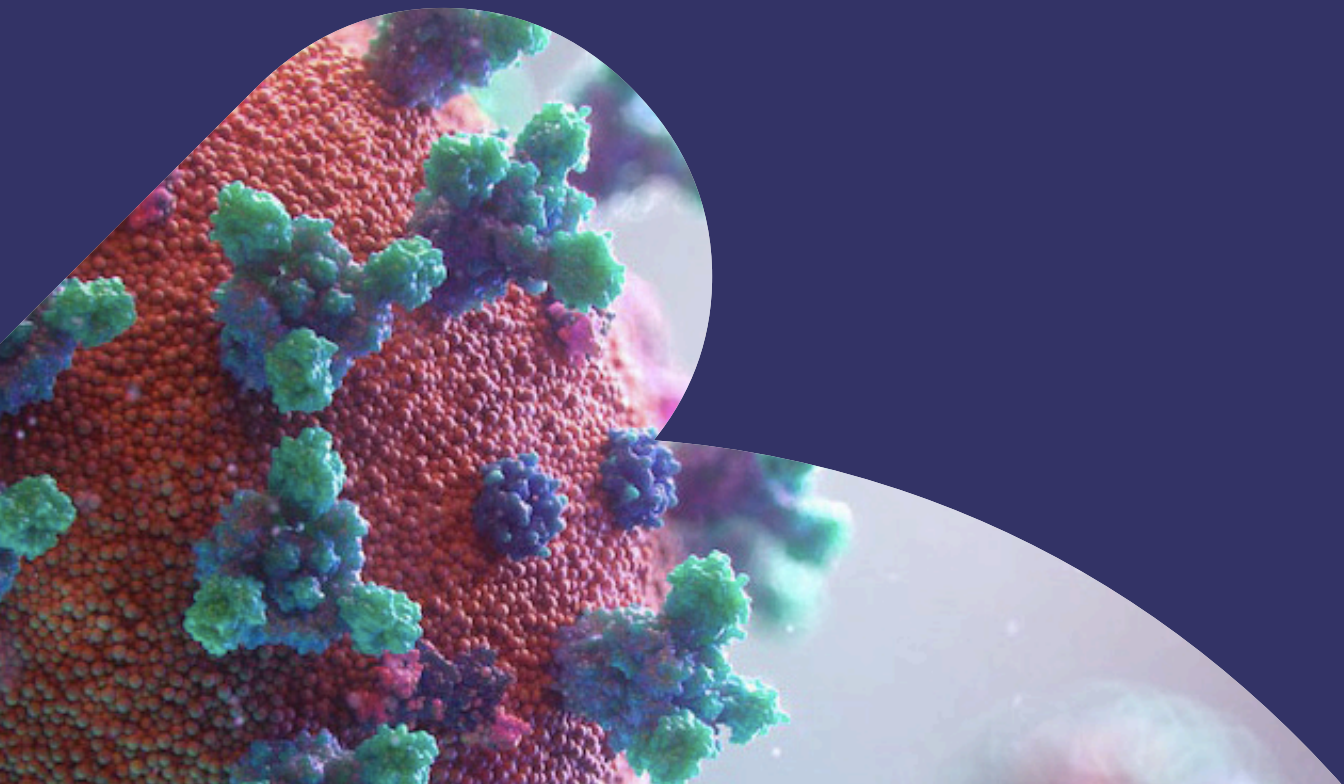




# The Covid-19 Crisis and Land Governance

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A Webinar Report




**LANDac**  
The Netherlands Land Academy

**2020 LANDac Online Encounter**

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[landportal.org](https://landportal.org)



This webinar took stock of the emerging insights on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on land rights and discussed concerns about the expected mid-to-long term impacts on equitable and sustainable land governance.

The discussion built upon previous efforts of the broader land governance community, including the Quick-scan Survey on the COVID-19 crisis by LANDac and the LANDdialogue, insights from the LANDac Professional Learning Programme and the webinar and discussion series 'Land Rights Implications of COVID-19' by the Land Portal Foundation and its partners.

The webinar was co-hosted by the LANDac and Land Portal Foundation as part of the **LANDac Online Encounter 2020**.

**Moderator:** Dr. Guus van Westen, Utrecht University & LANDac

**Panelists:**

- Chantal Wieckardt, LANDac coordinator
- Alke Gijrath, Facilitator, LANDdialogue
- Fridah Githuku, Executive Director, GROOTS Kenya and LANDac Fellow
- Laura Meggiolaro, Team Leader, Land Portal Foundation
- Jimmy Ochom, Land Rights Coordinator, Oxfam Uganda

**A complete recording of the webinar is available on YouTube:**  
<https://youtu.be/i4QB1Ka5x5s>



## Key Takeaways

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- **With the suspension of public administration services, fundamental rights like access to information are undermined. A particularly heavy burden has been paid by less developed countries with weaker land administration, where all services are predominantly paper based and have to be handled in person, where a digital environment is not the norm yet, and ICT capacity of public officers is low.**
- **The lack of governance, shrink of civic space and reducing presence of oversight bodies naturally generates a situation of lack of transparency and accountability as well as lack of collaboration, which may open the door to corruption.**
- **COVID-19 is having a disproportionate effect on smallholder farmers resulting in increasing food insecurity among the most vulnerable.**
- **The progress made in fighting for women's land rights is at risk of being lost as a result of the pandemic, while social movements are at a standstill.**

## Webinar Summary

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### **1) WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON LAND RIGHTS AND LAND GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS?**

- The first preventive measures taken by the government was the banning of public convenings, which had an instant effect in undermining collective organizing and rights advocacy by land movements. Pan-African investments were halted rendering the African rural women passive consumers of COVID News. Governments have also taken advantage of the pandemic to 'strife' democracy.
- When public land administration services are suspended, this means some fundamental rights like access to information are also undermined. Yet, an increased number of services have been required of local land administration, putting pressure on already exhausted land administration systems. Thus, there is a strong need for ICT-based land administration to maintain accountability and basic services. COVID-19 forces land administration and public offices to operate in a situation of semi informality.
- Small scale farmers have been hit the hardest, as many have not been able to sell their produce, resulting in the destruction of fruits and vegetables and the loss of earnings of this harvesting season. Many smallholders are unable to transport and market fresh produce to local and urban markets due restrictions of movement.
- Transfers of land rights have been halted or denied, as most land registries are locked down. Limited support to communities is likely resulting in illegal land transactions. The shutdown of the justice system is resulting in an overwhelming backlog of cases that will have legal ramifications long into the future.

- COVID has contributed to a spike of approximately 35% of Gender Based violence in Kenya. One of the manifestations of domestic violence is women being thrown out of their matrimonial homes or land.
- There are also isolated cases of people occupying private land that is not utilized or physically secured due to limited physical mobility of land owners, and normally this serves as an early indication of intended advance possession. We also anticipate to see isolated cases of repossession of land and homes that were used as collateral by banks.

## **2) WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO BE THE MID- TO LONGER TERM IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON LAND RIGHTS AND LAND GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS?**

- We expect deepened gender inequalities as COVID impacts compound already pre-existing inequalities between men and women in land ownership, while the underfunding of land-related public services will push women further to the edge.
- Underdevelopment of land and increased food insecurity in rural and also urban areas.
- Adoption of land policies, legislation and amendments without adequate public participation.
- Increased land conflicts, underfunding of land services, repossession of land used as collateral by banks.

## **3) WHAT DO YOU THINK WE CAN DO NOW TO ADDRESS THESE IMPACTS AND/OR CONCERNS?**

- Governments should take a multisectoral approach to reorient and rebalance policies and support local actions that can bring together key sectors and promote sustainable food production.
- National policies need to be put in place to ensure access to agricultural services for small scale farmers. Governments should provide smallholder farmers, food producers and herders with seeds, tools, livestock feed and other agricultural inputs.
- African states should provide alternative ways to adjudicate cases that affect small-scale farmers and communities, especially from large-scale land-based investments.
- There is a need to regain the trust of the public through openness and participation. Grassroot efforts on open data are emerging in relation to COVID-19, with the source code and documentation freely available to enable their use. Community operated digital land information systems can go a long way in protecting land rights.
- Developing model land laws/legislation that are adapted to pandemics for a few select countries in the Global south will make work easier for both the land ministries and land activists and help to accelerate adaptation of national land laws, policies, systems and land institutions to such pandemic context.
- We need integrated access to technology and internet connectivity as a top advocacy priority, and make the relationship between land rights and land governance explicit.

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## Notable Quotes from the Panelists

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**“TO FULLY GRASP THE CHALLENGES AND THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS WE NEED TO SYSTEMATICALLY GATHER AND MONITOR DATA AND DO SO OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME.”**

**- CHANTAL WIECKARDT, LANDAC COORDINATOR**



**“WE HAVE A SYSTEM FAILURE. THERE IS INCREASING PRESSURE THAT IS CAUSING VIOLENCE AND SUPPRESSION, AND THE WHOLE SYSTEM IS BOILING, AND IT’S FAILING TO TAKE CARE OF THE POOR.”**

**- ALKE GIJRATH, FACILITATOR, LANDDIALOGUE**



**“THE EFFECT ON THE COLLECTIVE ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY OF THE LAND MOVEMENT IS REAL. COVID-19 HAS ALMOST PUT THE LAND MOVEMENT TO SLEEP, WHICH IS QUITE UNFORTUNATE, BECAUSE THE STAKES ARE VERY HIGH.”**

**- FRIDAH GITHUKU, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROOTS KENYA AND LANDAC FELLOW**



**“THERE IS A STRONG LINK BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT AS PART OF THE RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS. THE CHALLENGE NOW IS BRINGING CLEAR MESSAGES TO THE GOVERNMENT FROM DIFFERENT SECTORS OF SOCIETY.”**

**- LAURA MEGGIOLARO, TEAM LEADER, LAND PORTAL FOUNDATION**



**“FOR MANY COUNTRIES, WHOSE GDPs DEPEND ON AGRICULTURE, FARMERS HAVE BEEN HIT THE MOST AS A RESULT OF COVID-19. WE ARE SEEING INCREASING FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER. ”**

**- JIMMY OCHOM, LAND RIGHTS COORDINATOR, OXFAM UGANDA**



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