



## Land Portal Evaluation Next Stage: Concept and Process

This is a call for expressions of interest in carrying out evaluation studies aimed at helping the Land Portal Foundation (<https://landportal.org/>) assess its current progress and develop its capacity to achieve its strategic goals.

### Background

#### About the Land Portal

The LP Foundation (LP) works for a world of improved land governance that benefits those with the most insecure land rights and the greatest vulnerability to landlessness. We do this by addressing key information gaps for all those concerned with land governance at all levels. The development process of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlighted the key roles that secure land tenure and good land governance has in underpinning economic development and sustainable land use and as a key dimension in women's empowerment. We are creating the leading online resource for information, data and knowledge-exchange on land governance issues. By working with a diverse range of partner organisations and by promoting new open-source data sharing technologies, we are building a better information ecosystem that will support all stakeholders to engage in more informed and inclusive land governance research, debate, advocacy and policy making. In doing this work and again in line with the overall SDG approach, LP is seeking to build trust and collaboration among actors, as this itself promotes information sharing and the development of this field.

Started as a project, the Land Portal became a not-for-profit organisation registered in the Netherlands in 2014. A geographically dispersed core team of specialists carries out most of its work. The team reports to a board of directors as well as to the foundation's donors, of which DFID has been by far the most significant. Support from DFID has come through its LEGEND (Land: Enhancing Governance for Economic Development) programme, a multifaceted approach to improving land governance with a focus on supporting responsible investment and reforms that deliver tenure security at scale and promoting greater transparency in the land sector. LEGEND has given significant attention to the role of information, its appropriateness, its management and its communications in investing in a number of globally engaged non-profit organisations with which LP collaborates, in addition to its support for the LP. DFID started supporting the LP in 2015 and is supporting this evaluation as part of a second phase grant with the aim of fostering the LP's overall effectiveness.

#### Current Priorities of the LP

The LP works to a theory of change (<https://landportal.org/about/vision>) which asserts that improvements in the content, accessibility and sharing of relevant information will lead to better and more equitable land governance. Its LP's new logframe organises this work around three objectives. These are broadly equivalent of outcomes but are phrased this way in recognition of their dependence on the decisions of third parties.

*Objective 1 Improve documentation, mapping and monitoring of land governance issues through a widely used platform providing data, structured information, tools and services*



This focuses on the LP's own platform and its capacity to identify relevant information sources and present them in ways which will allow their query and re-use by users. It is intended both to inform users and to support their own ability to find, adapt and re-use that information

*Objective 2 Promote and inform/enrich global debate and practice on key land issues*

This relates to the LP's function as a convenor, creating platforms for on-line debates on land issues and offering media and social media support to amplify discussions around land issues as well as events organised by partners

*Objective 3 Strengthen the capacity of land governance information work and network formation at all levels through developing awareness, skills and standards-based infrastructure*

This relates to the LP's vision of promoting an inclusive and effective information eco-system around land governance issues. It recognises that its own work and that of others is enhanced the more accessible everyone's information is. By building data infrastructure and raising awareness of and capacity to use open standards-based tools, the LP enables others to publish their information in forms where it will be found and used by others

Across all three objectives, the LP ensures attention and support is given to those working with marginalised land users at local levels, trying to understand their local information environments and encourage, where it is safe to do so, the articulation of local voices

The LP's current strategy is prioritising the production, distribution and discussion of information on five focus areas. This will guide work choices under all three objectives. These Focus Areas are:

- International Land Monitoring
- Land Investment
- Urban Tenure
- Women's Land Rights
- Customary and Informal Land Rights

The LP is engaged in a process of building its understanding of how knowledge is used by those active in these focus areas and developing its interactions with them, a process to which it expects this work to contribute.

#### **Land Portal's approach to Monitoring and Evaluation**

The LP has integrated M&E into its daily work from the outset. Monitoring is carried out through the regular collection of management information as work is organised and through the data generated by use of the web platform. There is consensus that this has become more efficient and relevant over time.

LP has also sought to embed a process of continuous evaluation. This is encouraged by the presence of an evaluative facilitator, a KM specialist familiar with the LP and its history, who has an occasional arm's length role in conducting interviews or surveys with team members and external stakeholders and using the material collected to encourage reflective discussion at both team and board level.

This semi-internal process has been helpful in tracking the development of the LP's information services and in identifying important practical issues which have affected the team and its relationships with key stakeholders. It has been less effective in identifying and documenting the qualitative impact of the LP's



work. There is some tension between the LP's role as primarily an information service, broadly defined, and its purpose, which is to mobilise the provision and use of information to stimulate improvements in land governance in specific thematic and geographic settings. As DFID's support for the LP enters its fourth year, there is agreement that the challenges of evaluating this complex set of activities would benefit from some fresh and fully independent input and that this, as well as providing new evaluative content, would support the continuing internal M&E process.

## **Aims and Scope of Work**

We are not seeking a standard evaluation. We are seeking an assessment of current progress against objectives, but we are also looking for an examination of the challenges of evaluating work which aims to effect change by making information available for others to use. It is hoped that this will provide a deeper understanding of how the LP's theory of change works in specific circumstances, such as those related to the LP's current focus areas. It is expected that this understanding will both enable the LP to target its work more effectively and be better able to communicate its value.

### **LP's Aims**

For the LP, the aims of this work are to:

- Evaluate and review on a recurrent basis (possibly each year but to be defined) progress towards each of LP's main objectives, with a particular focus on assessing impact in terms of how the information services influence how different users or user groups think, feel or act.
- Review existing M&E roles and methods within the LP team, including that of the facilitator and suggest how work should be evaluated in future, particularly in relation to the LP's objectives and related indicators of and understanding of qualitative change
- Raise the capacity of the core team and of internal M&E work to use this understanding to work more strategically, connecting their interactions with stakeholders and their internal reflection to the achievement of the LP's 2018-2021 Proposals
- Contribute to a broader understanding of the role of information, its management and communication in contributing to improved land governance and to ways of evaluating and documenting that role

### **Content**

The LP is open to discussing the methodology of the evaluation, its exact timeline and the forms in which it is delivered. It expects a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It is likely that there will be some combination of overall assessment with more detailed study of selected aspects of the LP's work. It is expected that beyond the evaluation of and recommendations for the LP's own practice, there will be evaluative content of value to wider audiences, in LEGEND and beyond, interested in how information work can contribute to development and how its effectiveness can be assessed. The LP would be open to proposals which offered a participatory approach and/or sought to involve members of the core team and the evaluative facilitator in contributing to the work proposed.

More specifically, we expect this work to generate:



- A review of the efficacy of the LP’s theory of change
- A better understanding of tracking progress towards outcomes and impact (more than outputs and their monitoring) with an assessment of the current practice in relation to objectives and of current indicators for tracking progress at that level
- Identification and detailed study of a sample of important processes related to the five focus areas and contexts to question how the LP intervenes in and engages with concrete land governance processes and to illustrate examples of how information from the LP is used through narratives of change towards objectives and impacts
- Development of the internal M&E processes to improve the effectiveness of stakeholder feedback and to facilitate consistent and continuous attention to core issues of progress towards objectives going forward, including recommendations for changes to existing indicators in the log frame
- Documentation of the above in ways which meet the specific needs of LP stakeholders and which address any wider methodological issues encountered

### **Desirable experience**

The Land Portal team is open minded as to what sort of evaluation provider and specific skillsets be involved in the process. Given the scope of the LP’s work, we would be happy to receive proposals from purposely assembled teams, provided that responsibilities for leadership and co-ordination are clear to ensure coherent results. We would expect to see evidence of skills and experience of most of following in a successful proposal:

- Familiarity with a range of approaches to evaluation, especially as they relate to information and knowledge and to partnerships and networks
- Readiness and capacity to work with concepts of complexity
- Knowledge of land tenure and governance as development issues and capability to assess the information environments for land-related processes at global, national and local levels and in relation to both policy and practice
- Direct engagement with processes of change related to one or more of the LP’s current Focus Areas
- Proven interest in the relation of information/knowledge in their diverse manifestations to development, including the use of digital platforms
- Knowledge of Open data principles and practices and the potential of standards, metadata management, and use of vocabularies in building sustainable and collaborative information environments

### **Process for Identifying New Evaluation Partner(s)**

In our view, the work we seek to commission, in both its subject areas and its processes, is more complex than standard evaluation work and likely to require new methodological approaches and a longer-term process and timeline of engagement with LP than traditional evaluations. We also believe it to be a potentially rewarding and unusual opportunity for anyone who recognises that how information can be shared and accessed, and how knowledge is created, and communicated is fundamental to whatever development can take place. The Land Portal expects to learn from the process and that the selected provider would also do so. This is why we use the word ‘partners’ in the sub-heading above. There needs to



be a commitment to co-operation and mutual learning between the core team and whoever is contracted to do this work. We also recognise that the extent and mechanics of this co-operation will need to be clarified in what we imagine will be a challenging process of developing proposals and teams capable of delivering this work.

At the same time, we have been reminded by a recent discussion thread on the Pelican list of the challenges of commissioning occasional work. We want to receive well thought out proposals but are aware of both the time they take to write and (for us) to properly assess. We are therefore proposing a process whereby:

1. We ask people, companies and research institutes interested in this opportunity to prepare short expressions of interest (two sides of A4 maximum) sketching out what has most caught their interest in this invitation and the main areas of relevant experience that they or their team would bring to the work. Short CVs of the main identified individuals proposed for this work can be attached. The deadline for the LP to receive this response is the end of July 2018
2. By the middle of August, The LP will select a small number of these responses (maximum 5) and invite their authors to submit more detailed proposals within a month. These will make clear the rationale for the proposed approach, its core methodologies, intended benefits and the main events and timelines foreseen for its achievement. For this stage, further documentation about the LP's work, including past evaluation reports and the current logframe, will be made available to bidders and there will be opportunities to talk to the co-ordinator and/or the internal evaluator / facilitator if required.
3. The LP will choose its preferred partner, finalise terms of reference including timelines and deliverables, and agree arrangements to carry out the first stage of this work by the end of January 2019. It will also offer feedback to unsuccessful participants on the short list.
4. This first stage will include proposals for M&E, relating to both internal work and the consultant(s), for the period to mid-2021, revisiting all relevant issues/processes and providing further assessments of progress. Subject to satisfaction with the first stage, these plans will be carried out by the same team.

The total budget for the entire work is around UKP 40,000.