

CONCEPT NOTE

*Virtual Expert Group Meeting
Land and Conflict in the Arab Region
16-17 March 2021*

Background

In collaboration with the UN-Habitat/ Global Land Tool Network (GLTN),¹ the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN)² is undertaking a study on land and conflict in the Arab region—one of the key areas of work of the Arab Land Initiative. This partnership is part of a broader programme funded by the German BMZ on land governance in the Arab region. The study will benefit from the input of the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty (ANFS).³

As part of the regional study, APN is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) bringing together specialists from different countries and areas of expertise in order to share knowledge on the land and conflict nexus. It will address land related causes of conflict and the effect of conflicts on land. The aim is to collect valuable information and create and strengthen a network of experts and actors dealing with the land and conflict nexus in the Arab region. The meeting is consistent with the United Nations Secretary General's guidance note on land and conflict endorsed in March 2019 which underscores the importance of a more coherent engagement on land to sustain peace and achieve the SDGs.

¹GLTN is an alliance of 77 international partners committed to increasing access to land and tenure security for all, with a particular focus on the poor and women. The Network's partners include international civil society organizations, research and training institutions, bilateral and multilateral organizations, and international professional bodies. UN-Habitat serves as the GLTN secretariat.

²APN is an independent civil society organization that seeks to enhance the capacity of the Arab region, including those impacted by conflict and occupation, to protect, sustain, and establish sovereignty over their natural resources and food, while strengthening the advocacy efforts of civil society organizations on regional and global environmental issues. APN serves as the ANFS secretariat.

³ANFS is comprised of 40 autonomous and organized civil society groups from across 14 Arab countries whose mandate is to improve food security and sovereignty. It includes organizations representing farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, women, youth, consumers and academics as well as NGOs. It strives to give members the ability to achieve consensus on priority issues and collectively advocate for regional and global agricultural and environmental issues.

Overview

Land is a complex resource, with economic and strategic value, and political and cultural significance. Land is also becoming increasingly scarce, especially in the Arab region: as demand for land increases, land pressure is rising, which in turn provides a fertile ground for competition and conflict over land. Land and conflict are intertwined and the linkages between both variables are of a diverse nature. They interact with and are affected by drivers such as increased urbanization, climate change, availability of natural resources, the absence of appropriate land governance and administration systems, corruption, peace and security.

The Arab region is prone to land-related conflicts as a number of the drivers listed above coexist, among others. Firstly, land is associated with the incremental demand for food in a region that imports 80% of the calories it consumes (UNESCWA, 2017). The region also has one of the highest rates of population growth in the world as it increased by nearly five times between 1950 and 2010. In comparison, during the same period, the global population grew by less than three times (UNESCWA, 2017). The Arab region also holds one of the smallest shares of arable land per capita (OECD-FAO, 2018). Inequality in land distribution is one of the largest worldwide. In fact, the Gini coefficient⁴ for land is among the highest in the world based on the most recent available data (GINI above 0.65): the region suffers from what Midlarsky (1988) calls “a bifurcation in the pattern of landholding”, where most of the large parcels of land are owned by a small number of people. This, according to the author, is a precursor for unrest and conflict. Moreover, Bush (2016) refers to unequal landholding as a barrier to the sustainable use of land in the Near East and North Africa region. Furthermore, fast-paced urbanization in the Arab region (Serageldin, 2016) causes an expanding need for housing and often underlies, along with rampant poverty and the heavy urban sprawl that competes with agriculture. Land-use planning, where it exists, is malleable and favors power. As a result, in most Arab countries, land is a commodity valued according to its exchange value rather than its production value. This has significant negative implications on the integrity of natural ecosystems and agro-ecosystems. The region’s limited fertile land and water resources are further pressured by climate change.

Due to these factors, land use and natural resources-related conflicts can be widespread. Conflicts range from large-scale violent confrontations to smaller localized conflicts. Land grabbing and dispossession by private investors, themselves often closely associated with state officials and politicians, can also spur conflict, as they sometimes prevent the local landowners and land users from accessing land and natural resources and build decent livelihoods. Aside from land grabs aimed at the production of agri-food commodities, “green grabbing” has also been documented. In Tunisia, the ostensible aim of protecting rangelands and forests has been reported to hide the appropriation of land for the purpose of creating private game reserves for

⁴ The Gini coefficient is a measure of the inequality in distribution in which 0 is equal distribution and 1 is most unequal.

wealthy regional elites. In Palestine, nature reserves are used in order to legitimize the Israeli occupation and establish military control over vast areas of the West Bank, thus preventing farmers from accessing their fields.

Political conflicts also intersect with land issues, and sometimes create them. The Global Peace Index ranks the Arab Region (Middle East and North Africa) as the least peaceful region in the world (Institute for Economics & Peace Global Peace Index, 2020). Regional violent conflicts – especially intrastate conflicts – have been on the rise in recent years, and have persisted with an unprecedented level of severity. Some have resulted in a massive migration of refugees to neighboring countries, such as the case of Syrian refugees to Lebanon and Jordan. This has fueled a myriad of issues many of which are additional stressors on the host countries' already fragile natural resources, infrastructure and housing capacity. Massive migrations and evictions often intensify land related conflicts. Returning Syrian refugees also grapple with challenges related to property ownership in case of missing or destroyed documents, and face competing claims over the tenancy, use and occupancy of land.

As these few examples show, on the one hand, land related conflicts can be the result of deeper underlying causes and on the other, land can be a source of conflict in and of itself. Hence, land issues and conflict have a very intricate relationship where one can re-enforce the other in a vicious cycle. Land can become a root cause for conflict, a trigger, a point of relapse or a bottleneck to recovery. Understanding the intersection between the two factors is therefore of fundamental importance to conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and recovery.

Responding correctly to land-related conflicts calls for a holistic approach to conflict that focuses on analyzing its root causes. A root cause analysis⁵ will determine the best approach to mitigating and preventing conflicts over land, as it will help build a common understanding and assist in thinking strategically about how to address land conflicts. Addressing underlying or systemic causes of conflict rather than the generalized or immediate causes of the incident allows for more successful mitigation and recovery. The importance of adopting the root cause analysis for land related conflicts in the Arab region will therefore be highlighted throughout the meeting in addition to the other objectives below.

⁵ The root cause analysis is a framework developed by GLTN. It enables the identification of the root causes of land related conflicts, what land looks like as a proximate factor for those root causes, and what are the linked triggers for conflict. The root cause of conflict is defined as a long-term factor that underlines the conflict. It could be environmental, socio-economic, or governance related. Proximate factors are immediately responsible for generating conflict but exist only because there is a root cause of conflict. Triggers are the flashpoints that fuel a response that will lead to conflict. Therefore, this interdisciplinary framework makes it possible to better examine and initiate programming in any country or area where land is part of the conflict.

Objectives

This EGM will bring together experts dealing with various aspects of the land and conflict nexus in the Arab region to:

- 1) Share knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt on the land and conflict nexus in the Arab region;
- 2) Identify different existing approaches to study and address the land and conflict nexus;
- 3) Develop a common approach based on the root cause analysis to understanding, describing, unpacking and developing solutions to conflicts involving land;
- 4) Help establish a first typology of land-related conflicts in the Arab region and identify the dominant forms;
 - Accumulate case studies of land-related conflicts in the Arab region on different scales (country and regional level) to increase empirical evidence, which will feed into the final study
 - Develop, through group discussions, a number of case studies using the root cause analysis:
 - A description of the conflict and its context
 - A listing of the relevant organizations
 - A description of the intervention and of the land tool (or tools) used or to be used
 - An analysis of the wider issues linked to the case studies

The resulting analysis will feed into the final report;

- 5) Collect bibliographic references, relevant for the study to be conducted by APN on land and conflict in the Arab region;
- 6) Establish new and strengthen existing knowledge clusters on the land and conflict nexus in the Arab region to increase expertise and facilitate exchange and enhance collaboration.

Key topics to be discussed during the EGM:

- 1) **Conflict related land tools** (*Supporting the achievement of objectives 2,3,4*):

Regardless of the stage of conflict, or the type of the land related conflict, there are tools and approaches that will allow a better and improved understanding of the conflict dynamics. These tools can also assist in the development of more effective responses and mitigation strategies. There are tools that allow the user to better analyze or assess land related conflicts,

or that will help in responding to land related conflicts, such as the root cause analysis tool developed by GLTN.

- ***Analyzing land related conflicts: The GLTN root cause analysis***
 - What are the keys aspects, components and sequence of the root cause analysis?
 - What is the importance of identifying the root causes of the conflict and how are they identified?
 - What is/are the proximate land factors, depending on the nature of the root causes, and what are the linked triggers that fueled the conflict?
 - What are the challenges to adopting a root cause analysis in the Arab region and where are the gaps?
 - What is the importance of this tool, how to disseminate it, and to whom?

- ***Responding to land related conflicts: other GLTN land tools***
 - What are the different GLTN Land Tools used to respond to land related conflicts and how can they be selected?
 - Do these tools respond to all types of conflicts and what are their challenges, shortcomings, and conditions for success?
 - Are there other interventions suggested by participants to respond to land-related conflicts?

2) **Studying land and conflict in the Arab region:** *(Supporting the achievement of objectives: 1,2,5 and 6)*

The Arab region is unlike any other. It has the highest number of countries in conflict and the largest number of internally displaced people. Disparities within and between countries are large, especially in regards to distribution of land and other forms of wealth. These circumstances highlight the need to study land related conflicts in the region. They also necessitate a discussion on what makes studying land related conflicts in the Arab region both special and challenging.

- What's the status quo of land related conflicts in the Arab region?
- What are the specific characteristics of land and conflict in the Arab region?
- Who studies land and conflict in the Arab region?
- What are the tools that are used for studying and addressing land related conflicts in the Arab region?
- Why is it important to consider inter and intra country differences and circumstances when analyzing land related conflicts?
- Which region or subregion is understudied in the Arab region?
- What are the current gaps and challenges in studying and addressing land related conflicts of the region?

3) **Typologies and forms of the land and conflict nexus in the Arab region:** *(Supporting the achievement of objectives 1,4,5)*

A typology approach to land-related conflicts attempts to classify such conflicts into predictable groups or patterns. Categorizing land-related conflicts will help generate better-targeted recommendations on how to mitigate and prevent challenges within each category. These typologies might include, for example, conflicts related to land tenure, land use and access to natural resources, economic and environmental injustice and exploitation, occupation and displacement.

- What are the different and most prevalent typologies of land related conflicts in the region? Under which typology does the described conflict fall?
- Who are the main actors involved? What are the root causes and triggers of conflict?
- Who/what is affected by the conflict? What are the conflicts' repercussions at the local and regional levels?
- Who were the stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and which methods have been adopted to facilitate and achieve conflict resolution? If the conflict hasn't been resolved yet, what are the recommended tools and methods to address the conflict?
- What are the positive and negative consequences of the interventions and what are their impacts?

Methodology of the EGM

1. Present the rationale behind the project "Land and Conflict in the Arab Region."
2. Examine the structural causes of land related conflicts
3. Introduce key global frameworks relevant to land related conflicts
4. Introduce the root cause analysis and other conflict-sensitive land tools.
5. Provide applied examples of the root cause analysis and the conflict-sensitive land tools to better understand and discuss them.
6. Present case studies on land related conflicts in the Arab region to engage experts in knowledge exchange.
7. Facilitate group discussions to help analyze the land related conflicts presented and identify appropriate interventions or land tools to respond to them.
8. Share valuable information, views, and references that will feed into the preparation of the final report.⁶

⁶ All relevant materials, including the final EGM meeting report will later on be shared with all participants.

Provisional Agenda

<i>DAY 1 - TUESDAY MARCH 16</i>			
Jordan time		Speaker(s)	Facilitator
9:00 – 9:30	OPENING SESSION		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming Remarks 	Mariam Al Jaajaa (General Manager – Arab Group for the Protection of Nature)	Razan Zuayter (President – Arab Network for Food Sovereignty)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Arab Land Initiative 	Ombretta Tempra (Human Settlements Officer – UN-Habitat/ GLTN)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Land and Conflict in the Arab Region 	Rami Zurayk (Senior Technical Consultant – APN/Professor-AUB)		
9:30-10:20	<u>SESSION 1: FRAMEWORKS AND CONCEPTS</u>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural Causes of Land Related Conflicts 	Max Ajl (Post-doctoral Researcher – Rural Sociology Group- Wageningen University)	Hala Murad (President of the Dibeen Association for Environmental Development in Jordan)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of Key Relevant Global Frameworks on Land and Conflict • The United Nations and the Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration in Violent Conflict Settings 	Clarissa Augustinus (Independent Senior Consultant – UNCCD)	
	Plenary Discussion		
10:20 - 11:15	<u>SESSION 2: ANALYZING AND RESPONDING TO LAND RELATED CONFLICTS</u>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Root cause analysis: A Methodological Approach to Land related Conflicts 	Ombretta Tempra (Human Settlements Officer – UN-Habitat/ GLTN)	Reem Najdawi (Chief of Food and Environment Policies Section- UNESCWA)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict-Sensitive Land Tools: Practical ways to respond to land related conflicts 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of Causes of Land Conflicts 	Babette Wehrmann (Lecturer and Land Governance Expert)	
	Plenary Discussion	All participants	
11:15 - 11:30	Break		
	<u>SESSION 3: LAND RELATED CONFLICTS: CASE STUDIES FROM THE ARAB REGION</u>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study from Syria 	Roula Maya (Professor of Sociology – University of Sharjah)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Palestine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jordan Valley 	Rahaf Rifai (Development and Resource Mobilization Officer – Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees)	Petra Samaha (PhD Candidate in Urban Sociology – Sciences Po)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Century of Colonial Land Policy (Palestine) 	The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study from Morocco <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (The Sous Region) - (<i>film screening</i>) 	Rahal Boubrik (Research Professor at the Institute of African Studies – Université Mohammed V)	
11:30 - 13:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Rabat) - (<i>film screening</i>) 	Soraya El Kahlaoui (Postdoctoral researcher – Department of the Middle East and North Africa at Ghent University in Belgium)	
	Plenary Discussion	All participants	

13:30-13:35	DAY 1 Wrap up	Mariam Al Jaajaa (General Manager – APN)	
<i>DAY 2 – WEDNESDAY MARCH 17</i>			
	<u>SESSION 4: LAND RELATED CONFLICTS: CASE STUDIES FROM THE ARAB REGION</u>		
9:00 – 10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Iraq 	Siham Kamel (Chair of the Department of Banking and Financial Sciences – Al Turath University College)	Tareq Hassan (Chairman of the International Youth Council – Yemen)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Tunisia (Oasis of Jemna) 	Mohamed Kerrou (Professor of Political Science – University of Tunis El Manar)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Yemen (Al Jawf Governorate) 	Amin al-Hakimi (Professor – Department of Agriculture - Sana’a University)	
	Plenary Discussion	All participants	
	<u>SESSION 5: LAND RELATED CONFLICTS: CASE STUDIES FROM THE ARAB REGION</u>		
10:30–12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Lebanon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khalil Hussein (Professor – International Law - The Lebanese University) 	Badia Aarab (Board Member – National Federation of the Agricultural Sector in Morocco/Formal President of the National Union for Moroccan Engineers)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Libya (Abu Isa- Zawiya) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naima Salameh (President of the Cooperative Association for Rural Women in the Western Sahel) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study on Sudan (Khartoum) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharaf Eldin Bannaga 	

		(Former Minister of Engineering Affairs and of Housing, Construction and Public Utilities/ Expert in Urban Planning/ Professor – Bannaga College in Khartoum)	
	Plenary Discussion	All participants	
12:00 –12:15	Break		
12:15 - 13:30	WRAP-UP Follow up session with the experts and coordinators & reference sharing	All participants	APN

Intended Participants

The EGM will invite 40-50 experts from different sectors including:

- Academia
- National, Regional and International Civil Society Organizations
- Public sector
- Intergovernmental Organizations
- Private sector

Criteria of Selection:

- Priority to conflict-inflicted countries
- Diversity in context (i.e. Mashreq and Maghreb countries)
- Gender balance

Organization of the Meeting

1. Date and venue

The regional meeting will be held virtually on 16-17 March 2021, from 9 am to 1:30 pm (Jordan time).

2. Registration:

Participants are requested to register online [here](#).

Following their registration, participants will receive a meeting link.

3. Working Languages

The meeting will be conducted in Arabic and English languages. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided.

General Enquiries

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References and further suggested readings:

- **Guidance Note of the Secretary General on “The United Nations and Land and Conflict”** – This is a high-level global guidance for UN agencies and partners on how to understand and address land and conflict issues. It provides a global framework for the work on land and conflict and it is also a useful framework for the work to be done by APN within this Agreement of Cooperation (AoC). <https://gltn.net/2019/03/15/guidance-note-of-the-secretary-general-the-united-nations-and-land-and-conflict-march-2019/>
- **“How to Do a Root Cause Analysis of Land and Conflict for Peace Building”** – This is an analysis tool that guides the analysis of land and conflict issues in a given context and can also provide practical guidance on how to structure and frame the regional study on land and conflict in the Arab region. <https://gltn.net/2017/12/04/how-to-do-a-root-cause-analysis-of-land-and-conflict-for-peace-building/>
- **“Land and Conflict in Jubaland: Root Cause Analysis and Recommendations”** – This is an assessment of the Jubaland State of Somalia undertaken using the root cause analysis tool outlined above. This case study can help explain the methodology that will be adopted in the meeting. <https://gltn.net/2018/10/19/land-and-conflict-in-jubaland-root-cause-analysis-and-recommendations-may-2018-abridged/>
- **“Land and conflict: Lessons from the field on conflict sensitive land governance and peacebuilding”** – This is a collection of case studies on the topic, providing an analysis of the key trends and crosscutting issues. It will also help in the framing of the land and conflict study to be done by APN within this AoC. <https://gltn.net/2018/08/23/land-and-conflict-lessons-from-the-field-on-conflict-sensitive-land-governance-and-peacebuilding/>

- **“Women and Land in the Muslim World: pathways for increasing access to land for the realisation of peace, development and human rights”** – This publication is dedicated to women and land, with particular reference to Muslim majority countries, both in Arab states and beyond. It contains useful elements to frame the study and, particularly, Chapter 7 is relevant as it focuses on displaced women’s access to land. <https://gltn.net/download/women-and-land-in-the-muslim-world/?wpdmdl=11954&refresh=5db5ac782e3d71572187256>

- *References:*

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Midiarsky, M. (1998). Rulers and the ruled: patterned inequality and the onset of mass political violence. *American Political Science Review* 82(2), 491-509.

OECD/FAO (2018), *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2018-2027*, *OECD Publishing*, Paris/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

Serageldin, Mona, et al. (2016) "Habitat III Regional Report for the Arab Region."

UNESCWA. (2017) *Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region*.