Safety Net of Innovative Land Tenure Solutions in Nepal

Submitted By: UN-Habitat Nepal



Organization Profile

Organization Name: UN-Habitat Nepal

Organization Type: United Nations entity

Website: www.unhabitat.org.np

Practice Details

Country(ies): Nepal

City(ies): Rajpur, Rapti, Gadhawa rural and Lamahi urban municipalities

Start Year: 2023 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

Housing Rights & Social Inclusion

Housing, Land & Spatial Planning

Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

“Land to landless” and “Home to homeless” is national agenda in Nepal since the democratic transition in 1951. However, access to land remained a central issue, with deep rooted feudal system and failed land reform of 1960s, fueling agitations that led to a decade long armed conflict (1996-2006). After the Peace Agreement, the Constitution (2015) guaranteed the right to land tenure security that is fundamental for the right to adequate housing and basic services, particularly for rural landless and marginalized, to live a life with dignity and security. Tenure security of implementation of estimated 1.34 mil landless or near landless households facing extreme poverty in Nepal is still slow. Diverse topography and limited arable land, high vulnerability to climate disasters directly impacts landless and indigenous people, facing land degradation and displacement. Thus, building nexus between land tenure and climate adaptation for sustainable management of land has become critical.

Solution Developed

The Constitution laid foundation for pro-poor land reform, mandating supportive policy, and legislation for implementation. Since 2013, UN-Habitat Nepal has supported this process in collaboration with Government of Nepal, supported by Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), to contextualize innovative Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) and test fit-for-purpose land administration (FFPLA) tools in 14 municipalities in Nepal. UN-Habitat further supported preparation of land policy and legislation, and institutional framework for ensuring sustainable land management and land tenure security, through regularizing informal tenure holders and providing land ownership certificates to landless, using tested FFPLA tools.

Further, current project funded by Republic of Korea (RoK) “Safety net of innovative land tenure solutions for near landless for greener rural Nepal” in Dang district focus on implementing land policy at the local level, for land tenure security of marginalized indigenous Tharu and Yadav communities. The nexus expands to land use planning that provides assurance of adequate, climate resilient and secure housing and livelihood opportunities, helping break cycle of extreme poverty.

Implementation

UN-Habitat through GLTN collaborated with government on land reform after the 2015 earthquake in devising FFPLA tools to support in land act reform, and establishment of policy and institutional framework (2021). Building on this experience, current 4-year project supported by RoK started in 2023 with focuses on localization of policy through direct support to 3 rural and 1 urban municipality to take identification, verification, recordation, (IVR) devised process of landless households, using participatory, gender-responsive FFPLA tools, towards issuance of land certificate. Support expands to land readjustment that formalizes tenure security of rural landless farmers to incentivize climate smart agriculture and implement land use plan. The

national actor with mandate of policy reform is Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation. At local level 18 municipalities are supported, currently -Lamahi, Rapti, Gadhawa, Rajpur– to lead IVR process till land certificate distribution. Community Self Reliance Centre (NGO) for social mobilization, academia (Kathmandu University & Land Management Training Centre) for knowledge documentation, capacity building and dissemination. 3 Korean partner's inputs on land information management, land use plan & livelihood. Project builds strong nexus between land tenure security, land use planning & climate smart livelihoods. ROK supported USD3.1 mil, with additional contribution of over USD700K from government and partners.

Enablers & Obstacles

Strong political commitment at both national and local levels is key enabler to work in complex issue of land rights. The proactive steps of government to develop pro-poor policy, act and regulation marked a turning point to recognize informal tenure and bring solutions at local level. Integrating FFPLA to develop procedure and institutional set-up of Land Commission in 2020, led at national and sub-national levels, ensured scalability. However, with the Commission being reconstituted multiple times, the process is delayed.

Key challenge to upscale localization is limited resources and capacity of municipalities to lead technical and administrative process. Formalization completes with integration of local records with the national land registry, frequently face bureaucratic delays. Conflict in interpretation of Forest Act and Land Act, restricts land transfers to vulnerable households operating near forests. The Government has presented a Bill to address this issue at parliament.

Results & Impact

Currently, UN-Habitat works with 4 municipalities to securing land rights for marginalized landless and unregularized informal tenure. The participatory IVR process supported 4,829 landless and 20,108 informal land tenure households, empowering local authorities to ensure transparency during process. Documentation of near-landless farmers is ongoing for accessing agricultural land to practice climate smart agriculture. The FFPLA tools developed in the project is adopted by the Commission as a standard operating procedure and upscaled to 750 out of 753 municipalities. As of Aug 2025, the Commission has collected tenure data for 1.1 mil Hhs, provided temporary cards and distributed over 7,150 land ownership certificates.

UN-Habitat's land reform initiative in Nepal has catalyzed policy reform and strengthened local governance. It has advanced gender equity and empowered communities, with mandated land certificates in the name of both husband and wife, to ensure women's right to property. Data driven approaches have laid a foundation for equitable land access for marginalized. Land certificate is required to access basic services like water supply, electricity, including government housing grant and finance for housing and livelihood enhancement. It encourages

households to invest in resilient and adequate housing and climate responsive use of land. Hence, impact of project is beyond human rights and assures resilient, dignified and secure life of marginalized communities.

Replication & Scale Up

At the national level, the Commission has signed MOU with 750 out of 753 municipalities. As of Aug 2025, the Commission has collected tenure data for 1.1 mil Hhs, provided temporary cards and distributed over 7,150 land ownership certificates.

The approach of providing technical support to the municipalities needs to be scaled up from 4 project municipalities to over 700 municipalities to generate the impact at scale and accelerate the process of IVR of landless and informal settlers. Linking further with housing and other grants of the municipality would benefit the marginalized communities.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

National Land Policy (2019) and National Land Act (2021) has recognized informal tenure holders and integrated FFPLA to identify these households through developing a structured regulatory framework to upscale and standardize approach in all 753 municipalities.

Lessons & Takeaways

To multiply the project's impact, after handover of the land certificates, linking the households with the government's public housing and safer housing programme would further improve their housing conditions. Further, settlement-based approach on increasing accessibility to water, sanitation and clean energy would be effective to improving the living environment. This will provide comprehensive support on adequate and secure land, housing, basic services and resilient livelihoods.