

LANDac Online Encounter 2020

Conference report



LANDac – the Netherlands Academy on Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development – brings together researchers, policy makers, development practitioners and business professionals in the field of land governance and development. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LANDac Annual International Conference took place fully online. Despite the circumstances, LANDac brought the global land governance community together to take stock of research, policy and practice from around the world, as well as to reflect on the current COVID-19 crisis, as alarming observations are coming in about the loss of livelihoods and deepening poverty, government crackdowns on civil society, the suspension of land administration services and irregular land acquisition. What are the immediate effects of the pandemic, and how might it change the future work and priorities of the land governance community?

About LANDac

LANDac – the Netherlands Land Academy – is a partnership between Dutch organisations and their Southern partners working on land governance for equitable and sustainable development. LANDac brings together researchers, policymakers and practitioners who share a concern for land inequality and land-related conflicts to conduct research, distribute information and forge new partnerships. LANDac is hosted by Utrecht University and financed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

www.landgovernance.org

Reading guide

This report is an impression of the LANDac Online Encounter 2020, which took place between the 29th June and the 3rd of July 2020. It provides a summary of the opening session, two plenary keynote addresses, three central webinars and the closing discussion, as well as a brief overview of the parallel sessions that took place throughout the conference.

Conference Organising Committee 2020

Joanny Bélair (University of Ottawa), Gemma van der Haar (Wageningen University), Lotte van der Heijden (LANDac), Laura Meggiolaro (Land Portal Foundation), Richard Sliuzas (ITC – University of Twente), Neil Sorensen (Land Portal Foundation), Marja Spierenburg (Leiden University), Guus van Westen (Utrecht University), Chantal Wieckardt (LANDac).

Media Partnership

LANDac is grateful to the Land Portal Foundation, the key media partner of the LANDac Online Encounter 2020.

www.landportal.org



DAY 1 MONDAY 29th JUNE 2020

The full recordings of the opening session and key note addresses can be found online, [here](#).

OPENING

Gemma van der Haar, Assistant Professor at the Wageningen University, Department of Sociology of Development and Change, and co-chair of LANDac, opens this Online Edition of the LANDac Conference and warmly welcomes the participants from all over the world. The current COVID-19 crisis has forced LANDac to improvise – we originally planned our regular conference in Utrecht, the Netherlands, focussing on climate change in relation to land issues. Even though LANDac has had to postpone that conference to next year, we felt that it was important to bring the global land governance community together. Importantly, this online conference also serves as an opportunity to share and reflect on our experiences under the COVID-19 pandemic so far, and how the mitigation measures instigated by governments around the world affect land access and land governance.

In the many reflections and discussions that will be shared this week, we hope that you will find opportunity to learn about and discuss what this crisis has revealed; what are the cracks in the system, and what are the vulnerabilities in the ways we have organized our global economies and food systems? We hope you will also learn and discuss about the current state of land governance around the world, how



LANDac chairs Gemma van der Haar and Guus van Westen open the LANDac Online Encounter 2020

resilient the systems that we have built are, and whether they can stand up to the pressures created by COVID-19. We also hope that you will share what you are seeing, perceiving and analysing, as well as ideas on what needs to be done, and how we can avoid the pandemic becoming a land rights and a land governance crisis. As LANDac we believe that it's our shared duty to understand, monitor, anticipate and address the effects of this crisis and its interaction with other, broader, concerns.

“We believe that it is our shared duty to understand, monitor, anticipate and address the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and its interaction with other, broader concerns.” – Gemma van der Haar

Guus van Westen, Assistant Professor at Utrecht University, International Development Group, and co-chair of LANDac, extends the warm welcome to the participants of the LANDac Online

Encounter. Emphasising the silver linings of the current situation, Van Westen hopes that the Online Encounter will provide the opportunity to find new ways to join forces and exchange experiences, leading to new and innovative outcomes.

KEYNOTES

JUN BORRAS Changing the Climate of Global Land Politics

Saturnino (Jun) M. Borras Jr., Professor of Agrarian Studies at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), explains in his keynote address that there are at least two ways in which climate change and land are linked. Firstly, a particular kind of land politics contributes to enabling and maintaining the current global agri-food system, which is a fossil energy-based industrial system. This system is sustained by direct and indirect control of land by dominant social classes and corporations. Secondly, mainstream and alternative ideas and practices of climate change mitigation and adaptation are directly and indirectly to a certain extent land-based or land-oriented.

Better understanding the link between climate change and land requires an explicitly political understanding of climate change mitigation and adaptation – the

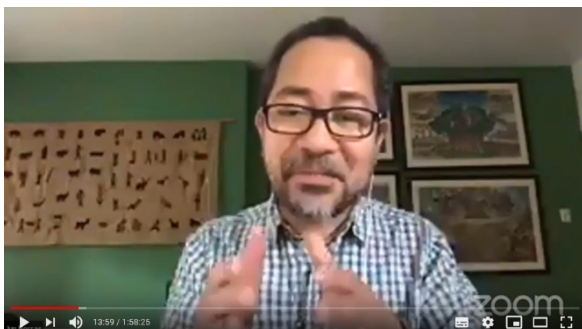
climate change politics. Such climate change politics – the dynamics in the spheres of social structures, institutions and political agenda that set and shape the meanings, causes and consequences of climate change, and how it can be addressed, by whom, where and when – alter current practices around the world. This is not only the result of formal politics, policies or projects, but also of speculations, rumours, gossip and spectacle.

“We need to contest the apparent consensus around a generic notion of ‘land tenure security’, by advancing a specific agenda of what tenure means, whose tenure and for what broader purposes, in terms of what social system.”

– Jun Borras

The current narrative that both reflects and shapes the nexus between climate change politics and land, namely that some types of agrarian systems, especially shifting agriculture and mobile pastoralism, are economically inefficient and ecologically destructive, is extremely powerful in recasting social relationships around land. In addition, the climate change narrative is increasingly being deployed as a reason to pursue centralization, even when the real reasons behind centralization often differ.

Land tenure security takes a central place in such narratives, promoting the formalization of property rights regimes. This often leads to formalizing land property relations in settings marked by inequalities and past cycles of dispossession and displacement, thus



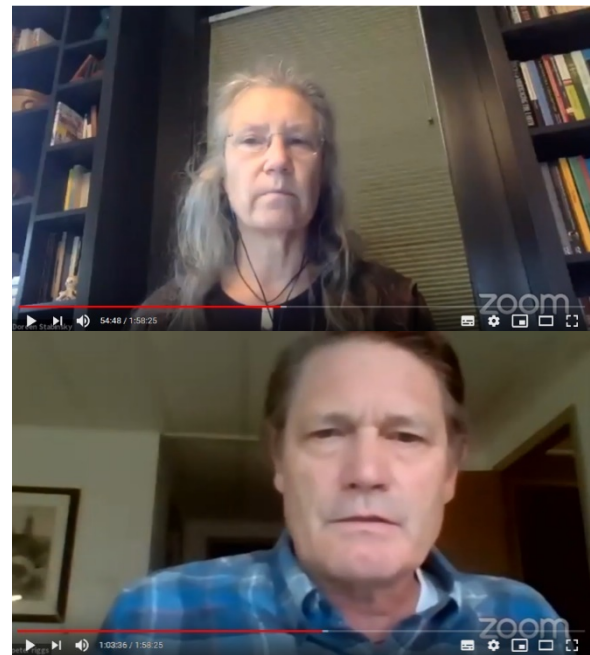
Keynote speaker Jun Borras

formalizing existing inequalities. Even when strengthening land tenure security is interpreted in a pro-poor manner, it is done so in an isolated way at a localized, project-level scope and scale, often impeding system-wide, deep social reforms, at present and in the future.

Climate justice without agrarian justice (and vice versa) is inconceivable – what we need is agrarian climate justice. To achieve this, firstly, we need to contest the apparent consensus around a generic notion of ‘land tenure security’, by advancing a specific agenda of what tenure means, whose tenure and for what broader purposes, in terms of what social system. This means redistribution, recognition and restitution within a social justice framework, sandwiched between the right to a ‘minimum access’ to land and a society-wide ‘land size ceiling’. Secondly, we need to change the climate of global land politics. The current climate change crisis and global COVID-19 pandemic can become an opportunity to push for radical, positive social reforms that were previously unthinkable.

DOREEN STABINSKY and **PETER RIGGS** Missing Pathways

In 2018 CLARA (Climate Land Ambition Rights Alliance) published the report ‘Missing Pathways to 1.5°C’, providing an alternative to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) request to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for an analysis on ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Whereas the findings of the IPCC report focus on large-scale technological



Keynote speakers Doreen Stabinsky and Peter Riggs

mitigation solutions, **Doreen Stabinsky**, professor at the College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbour, explains that there is a neglected side as well: what are possible pathways to reduce global warming of 1.5°C that do not involve technological solutions? CLARA looked into this question, focussing on the land sector.

Professor Stabinsky outlines three starting principles of the report: First, addressing climate change requires radical transformational change based on equity. Second, land is crucial for food security and food sovereignty, acknowledging that small-scale producers produce the majority of the food globally, for local, not global markets. Third, land must be managed with a rights-based approach, ensuring public participation and preserving livelihoods.

Simultaneously, there's a set of interlocking global crises: there is not just a climate crisis, but a climate crisis in combination with a biodiversity crisis and a rights crisis.

All these crises unfold in a context of global inequality and systems that construct and perpetuate that inequality. To address these crises, Professor Stabinsky argues that we need to start from two key principles: the right to food and expanding and enhancing agroecology. The challenge is to bring about real transformations, as tinkering around the edges will not be enough.

“Land tenure security is treated as an output, when in fact, secure land tenure within a social justice framework is a precondition for the success of all other mitigation and adaptation efforts.” –

Peter Riggs

Even though land tenure security is often seen as a solution to the climate change crisis, **Peter Riggs**, director of Pivot Point and convener of CLARA, explains that it is also misunderstood as a climate solution in three ways. Firstly, land tenure security is sometimes treated as an output, when in fact, secure land tenure within a social justice framework is a precondition for the success of all other mitigation and adaptation efforts. Secondly, technology-based large-scale mitigation solutions are too often planned in ways that disregard existing land uses and the livelihoods of entire communities. Thirdly, much of the language in the UNFCCC’s Convention on Climate Change is based on the discourse of avoiding deforestation, as opposed to a much more active frame of reforestation and forest regeneration.

There are three areas that are addressed in the Missing Pathways report that provide a way forward: Firstly, the impor-

tance of indigenous community lands and their space for self-determination, as these communities are often the holders of the world’s most biodiverse areas. Secondly, we need to transform agricultural practices, especially limiting animal production and consumption in the Global North. Lastly, we need to recognize the importance of, and conserve forests and other ecosystems, together with forest-dependent communities.

Discussion with the audience

In the discussion that follows the key note addresses, led by **Marja Spierenburg**, Professor in the Anthropology of Sustainability and Livelihoods at Leiden University, the audience raises several questions and discussion points, focusing on the tension between different farming methods; the definition of ‘minimum land access’ and a ‘land size ceiling’; and what has been learned from the climate crisis and the importance of land that might have implications for the current COVID-19 crisis.

In the discussion, Doreen Stabinsky and Peter Riggs emphasize the importance of making a distinction between farmland productivity and efficiency – productivity is often equated with efficiency. However, whereas productivity can not only be seen



Moderator Marja Spierenburg

as food production, but e.g. also as preserving ecosystems, efficiency is too often oriented towards maximizing the production of a single commodity on a piece of land. Therefore, the question of efficiency needs to be problematized.

Jun Borras explains that a 'minimum land access' and a 'land size ceiling' on their own will not resolve the problem of workable livelihoods for everyone. They should always go hand in hand and ensure a redistribution of the access to and control of resources. This means looking at the different types of social categories within a society and their particular kinds of land questions, not only for (food) production, but also for social reproduction.

Reflecting on the current COVID-19 crisis, Professor Stabinsky explains that crises such as these show the vulnerability of our current industrial agricultural systems and long supply chains. The crisis might also be a warning of what lies ahead of us – it might be one of the intensifying impacts of climate change, with more to come. Professor Borras emphasises, however, that the COVID-19 crisis also shows us that there are opportunities for transformations. He thinks that the crisis could turn two ways: on the one hand it can be an opportunity to advance positive, progressive agendas, whereas on the other hand it can spiral downwards into a situation where corporate interests are able to seize the political opportunity to accumulate and control even more land. A social insurance for poor people in the form of 'minimum land access' and a 'land seize ceiling' might be a response to this.

DAY 2 TUESDAY 30TH JUNE 2020

The recordings of the second day of the Online Encounter can be found online, [here](#).

CENTRAL WEBINAR The Multifaceted Challenges of Land and Climate Change

Moderated by: Barbara Codispoti, Global Land Program Lead, Oxfam Novib.

Panellists: Sara Scherr (EcoAgriculture Partners), Amy Senter (Kellogg Company), Jagdish Krishnaswamy (Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation), Clemence Abbes (Oxfam Peru).

The webinar 'Multifaceted Challenges of Land and Climate Change' explores the interconnection of land rights and climate responses at micro, meso and macro level. The webinar aims to examine the following question: What kind of land governance will foster adequate climate response actions? Oxfam and partners in many countries are confronted with this problem



Moderator Barbara Codispoti and panellist Jagdish Krishnaswamy

while dealing with both land and climate justice interventions. Oxfam is currently investing in deepening the analysis of land & climate nexus at both country and global level. Read the full webinar report by the Land Portal Foundation [here](#).

Key Takeaways:

- Climate change adaptation and mitigation can only be achieved if the land and property rights of stakeholders are assured and if communities form an integral part of landscape approaches and commodity supply chains.
- Land represents both a problem and a solution to climate change; deforestation and land grabs from communities will further exacerbate climate change, while company commitments to sustainable supply chains combined with secure management of land by indigenous and local communities will reduce GHG emissions.
- Bringing communities voices to the table with government and the private sector ensures that policies and programs will have meaningful and sustainable impact.

PARALLEL SESSIONS

On the second day of the conference, two parallel sessions took place:

Parallel Session 1: Climate change mitigation instruments and interventions in the land sector: perspectives from multi-level, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder processes – International Land Coalition (ILC) and International Fund for Agricultural Development, with ILC Members and partners.

Parallel Session 2: Community Rights to Forest Lands: What are the key conditions for success? – Tropenbos International, IUCN Netherlands Committee & Milieudefensie.

DAY 3 WEDNESDAY 1st JULY 2020

The recordings of the third day of the Online Encounter can be found online, [here](#).

CENTRAL WEBINAR The COVID-19 Pandemic and Land Governance

Moderated by: Dr Guus van Westen, Utrecht University and LANDac.

Panellists: Chantal Wieckardt (LANDac), Alke Gijrath (LANDdialogue), Fridah Githuku (GROOTS Kenya), Laura Meggiolaro (Land Portal Foundation), Jimmy Ochom (Oxfam Uganda).

This webinar takes 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-



Panellists Fridah Githuku and Alke Gijrath

term impacts on equitable and sustainable land governance. The discussion builds 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 full report of the webinar by the Land Portal Foundation can be found [here](#).

Key takeaways:

- 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, shrinking 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 small-holder 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.

PARALLEL SESSIONS

On the third day of the conference, three parallel sessions took place:

Parallel session 1: Towards new realities: Monitoring land-based investments before, during and after COVID-19 – LANDac Fellowship Programme.

Parallel session 2: Mitigation of GHG-Emissions through Effective Peatland Management: Opportunities, Challenges & Solutions – Land Component of the bilateral Project: German-Ukrainian Agricultural Policy Dialogue, implemented by BVVG German AgriForest Privatisation Agency.

Parallel session 3: Monitoring, Managing and Protecting the Integrity of Land Governance Systems, Land Registration and Land Claims from Climate Change Effects Using Blockchain Technology – Power of Chain Consultancy; Government Blockchain Association; Foundation for the International Blockchain and Real Estate Expertise (FIBREE).

DAY 4 THURSDAY 2nd JULY 2020

The recordings of the fourth day of the Online Encounter can be found online, [here](#).

CENTRAL WEBINAR The Nexus Between Urban Land Governance and Climate Adaptation

Moderated by: Prof dr Richard Sliuzas, Professor of Urban Planning for Disaster Risk Reduction, University of Twente.

Panellists: Kei Otsuki (Utrecht University), Shuaib Lwasa (Makerere University), Diana



Moderator Richard Sliuzas and panellist Kei Otsuki

Reckien (University of Twente), Jaap Zevenbergen (University of Twente).

Informal settlements in areas that are already disaster prone are an increasing problem. Climate adaptation is also often used as an excuse for evictions to redevelop sites in a more climate-proof manner in what is often referred to as 'climate gentrification'. Nature-based solutions to climate change, such as increasing green spaces, may increase home values, but the question of who benefits from these initiatives arises. How can the side effects of climate interventions that can lead to inequality, such as increase in value, be avoided? This webinar addresses transparency and accountability in these processes. It explores the alignment of policy processes with climate adaptation plans that can easily create conflict, looking at inclusivity and equity in processes and in outcomes. The full report of the webinar by the Land Portal Foundation is published online [here](#).

Key takeaways:

- Climate adaptation efforts, such as developing green infrastructure, have numerous benefits, but if not planned carefully may lead to gentrification and marginalization of the urban poor.
- Cities often target flood-prone areas for resettlement, which has a greater impact on those who live in informal settlements. Alternatives such as upstream greening and water retention should be considered.
- The development of large-scale infrastructure projects to counter extreme weather impact poor people the most, and governments and investors should make commitments to be transparent and accountable to share the benefits of infrastructure development with those most in need.
- The rights of people living in informal settlements are often ignored, while the rights of formal property owners are often exaggerated, often leading to compensation of the elite in the case of natural disasters, with the poor, especially women and minorities, bearing the burden of climate change consequences.

PARALLEL SESSIONS

On the fourth day of the conference, two parallel sessions took place:

Parallel session 1: Redirecting Investments: Exploring and Changing Food Communication Regimes to Create Recognition for Farmer-led Irrigation Development & Urban Agriculture in

Africa's Expanding Cities – Utrecht University and partners.

Parallel session 2: Why feelings matter when it comes to measuring tenure security – Prindex.

DAY 5 FRIDAY 3rd JULY 2020

The recordings of the final day of the Online Encounter can be found online, [here](#).

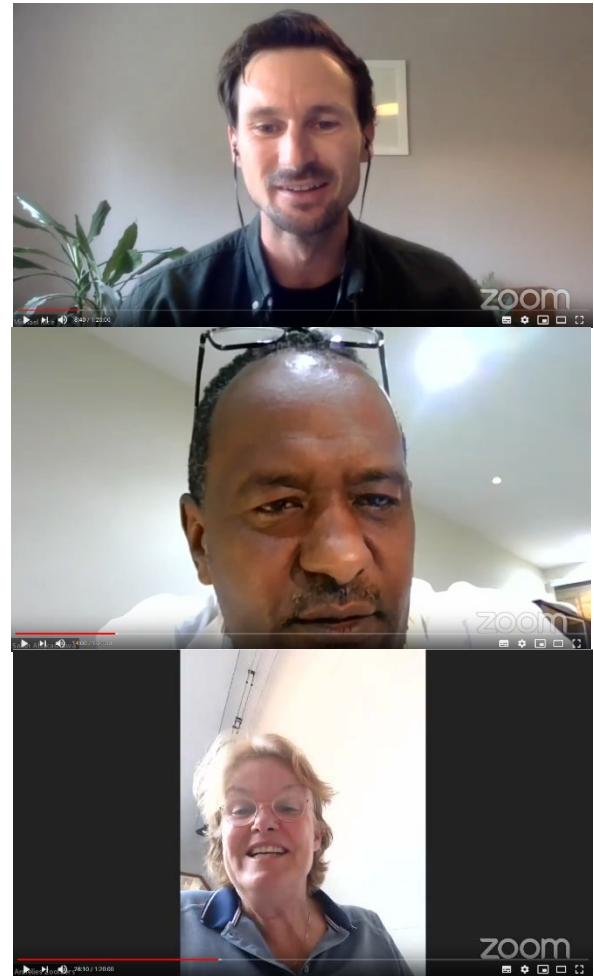
CLOSING PANEL AND DISCUSSION

On the last day of the conference, a panel of experts looks back on the previous four conference days, moderated by **Richard Sliuzas**, Professor of Urban Planning for Disaster Risk Reduction at the University of Twente.

Alda Salomão (Centro Terra Viva) argues that while COVID-19 has exposed some possibilities to change current economic models, it remains to be seen whether political and economic elites are willing to actually introduce changes in their investment policies. Salomão says that the pandemic is an opportunity for the EU governments in general, and the Dutch government in particular, to scrutinize their land and investment policies, imposing a more rigid and firmer position on good governance measures.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is used as an excuse by investors to limit or even pause participation of local communities around land-based investments.” – *Alda Salomão*

However, the COVID-19 pandemic is often used as an excuse by investors to limit or



Panelists Michael Rice, Salaheldin Abukashawa and Annelies Zoomers

even pause participation of local communities around land-based investments. We need to ensure that communities at the local level know their rights and responsibilities, how to use legal frameworks and how to engage in dialogue and negotiation in interactions with other actors. Moreover, the commitment by the EU to due diligence needs to go beyond assessing the rule of law and should also take access to justice into account.

Michael Rice (Both ENDS) notices that the discussions we have had increasingly take a broader perspective on land, taking into account that secure land tenure is an important enabling factor for a whole

range of other fundamental human rights. At the same time, in those places where land inequality remains an issue, these often overlap with other kinds of intersecting, structural forces that make local rights holders vulnerable. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has exposed the vulnerabilities and consequences of globalized food production systems and the levels of social and economic inequality present in almost every country. Michael argues that the biggest opportunity for transitioning towards a more sustainable system of land distribution and food production is to provide more support at the very local grassroots level for communities who already know the kinds of solutions they want to implement, but lack the safe political space or the resources to do so.

Annelies Zoomers (Utrecht University) argues that while strengthening land rights and land tenure might help some groups to protect their rights, it might also simulate further commoditization of land, increasing existing inequalities. Due to the fact that some people have land titles, crises such as COVID-19 may force them to sell their land out of distress. As such, we need to keep land investments, particularly stimulated by crises such as climate change and COVID-19, firmly on the agenda, and radically change the way we approach investments. We need to start thinking about what investments are necessary to address the problems in the world and start formulating projects and programmes from the bottom-up. We should move away from large-scale investments towards processual invest-

ments, where we can constantly monitor what is happening on the ground. We can do so by creating a network of people on the ground, who also provide investors the opportunity to access reliable information on the local situation. Investments are needed, but in such a way that local people have a clear say in what direction they are going.

“We need to start thinking about what investments are necessary to address the problems in the world and start formulating projects and programmes from the bottom-up.” - *Annelies Zoomers*

Salaheldin Abukashawa (ISTIDAMA Centre for Land and Environmental Governance and LANDac fellow) also highlights the important role for organisations such as LANDac to continue to establish local and regional networks. These networks can exchange experiences amongst themselves, while creating dialogues and facilitating exchange between the different stakeholders in the field.

CLOSING

Guus van Westen (Utrecht University & LANDac co-chair) thanks all the participants to the LANDac Online Encounter. The online conference proved that it is possible to conduct insightful and meaningful webinars and online exchanges, reaching a more diverse audience than ever before. Van Westen identifies three key messages he takes away from this conference. Firstly, there is an increased concern for issues of justice

and inclusion, especially in times of crisis, which often tend to polarize. There is an urgency for corrective actions, addressing the needs of less advantaged people and engaging seriously in a transformation towards a more sustainable and just society. Secondly, the current crisis highlights the importance of the interlinkages between issues and exposed our dependence on mobility. We need to continue to approach issues as complex systems, looking at the economic, social, ecological, and technical dimensions. Finally, we have found that genuine multi-stakeholder dialogue is not that easy. Active participation from policymakers and private for-profit sector, organizations and companies in multi-stakeholder activities is an issue that we need to continue to address.

Gemma van der Haar (Wageningen University & LANDac co-chair) adds two messages to take away from the conference. First, the insistence on rights and the need to protect rights has been at the heart of LANDac from the start until today and will continue to be so. Van der Haar expresses the hope to continue to work together on this in the near future. Secondly, many crises end up being missed opportunities. It's our joint duty to make sure that we won't have to conclude that in the case of the crisis that we are currently witnessing, and that some gains will be made. Therefore, we continue to need each other to identify opportunities and explore what change is possible. We would like to thank all the participants that joined us over the past five days.

About LANDac

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For more information about our work, please contact us at landac.geo@uu.nl or visit: www.landgovernance.org

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