

# land portal

**inform**

**open**

**debate**

**strategy**

**Our mission** is to nurture a growing information ecosystem on land governance to inform and improve decision-making, policy and practice at all levels.

**Our vision** is a world with improved land governance that supports people with insecure land rights, protects those vulnerable to landlessness, and ensures open access to information for all.





# introduction

**We have never enjoyed greater access to information than we do in the 21st Century and our demands for reliable data have never been higher. However, within the land sector critical information continues to be fragmented, unstructured and inaccessible.**

The Land Portal exists to address these challenges by nurturing a vibrant online platform to inform and engage with partners, promoting open data and the sharing of best practices and stimulating debate and collaboration both on and offline. We provide a vital bridge for those grappling with complex land governance issues – from researchers and NGOs through to governments and grassroots communities – connecting people, facilitating dialogue and joining the dots between fragmented information and disparate data.

The Land Portal was established in 2009 to create, curate and disseminate land governance information; helping to foster a more inclusive and accessible data landscape. Over the subsequent ten years, the Land Portal has grown to become an information gateway and resource base, a vibrant online community of users from around the world, and a trusted voice within the land governance sector globally.

We believe data and information are powerful tools for achieving our vision of a land governance system that benefits those with the most insecure land rights and the greatest vulnerability to landlessness. However, information sources remain highly fragmented, unstructured, poorly curated, represent a narrow range of perspectives, and continue to be published in ways that do not facilitate maximum discovery, engagement and reuse. Until policy and decision-makers, intermediaries and grassroots groups have access to the data and information they need to make sound decisions, their initiatives (programs, policies, campaigns) will fail to achieve maximum impact.

Raising awareness of “open data” – and the critical role it plays in realising tenure security for individuals and communities around the world – continues to be our greatest challenge. To this end, we make use of every possible conference, meeting and speaking engagement to promote the concept of “going open”, while recognising that, given the highly sensitive nature of land data (particularly for vulnerable communities), not everything can or should be made entirely open.



As we look to the future, the Land Portal has developed an updated strategy and theory of change that articulates how the organisation will:

- improve the documentation, mapping and monitoring of land governance issues;
- enrich and inform the global debate on land rights;
- democratise access to the land governance “information ecosystem” and improve the flow of data between diverse actors.

At the Land Portal, we take great care to protect the highly-valued role we play as a neutral actor within the highly complex landscape of land governance, while recognising our duty to use information to support vulnerable communities in securing their land rights. We use every opportunity to engage our target audiences – policy-makers, academics, information providers, land practitioners, development agencies and local organisations – and to raise awareness of the critical importance of open data in global land governance.

We believe this strategy will enable us to further strengthen and broaden our work to improve land data and information around the world. Thank you for your interest in the Land Portal and for taking the time to explore our latest strategy document.



# our pillars

The Land Portal has three primary objectives, underpinning all of our activities, that target the challenges faced in land governance systems around the world. We refer to these objectives as our “pillars”.

improve documentation, mapping and monitoring of land governance issues through a widely used platform providing data, structured information, tools and services.

democratise the information ecosystem by supporting the creation of a standards-based data infrastructure and building the capacities of information providers, to strengthen the flow of land governance information, from all perspectives and all levels.

promote, inform and enrich the global debate and practice on key land issues while raising the visibility of national, regional and international partners.

# challenges and responses

Our strategy has been developed to target three principal challenges that we believe negatively affect land governance systems worldwide.

*Fragmented, incomplete  
and closed data*

*Poorly managed data from local sources leaves  
vital information inaccessible and under-leveraged*

*Discussions around land governance  
exclude grassroots voices*

## Challenge #1

### Fragmented, incomplete and closed data

The vast majority of land governance data remains closed or expensive to access, fragmented and poorly organised. The tools needed for visualising and tracking information on key land governance themes are lacking or unavailable to most users. Land monitoring initiatives lack collaboration among, and synergy between, key stakeholders resulting in inefficiency and the duplication of efforts.

**Our response** to the fragmentation and inaccessibility of information is to develop and nurture a multilingual platform ([landportal.org](https://landportal.org)) that hosts a wide range of country, issue and dataset portfolios. We aggregate and publish data, news articles, publications and much more, to make otherwise dispersed content easy to discover and access.

**Our goal** is to create a fully-inclusive information landscape.

We will achieve this by proactively aggregating and linking to content from a wide variety of land governance information providers, which we enrich with standardised meta-data and present in easy to understand and easy to use formats.

### Key Activities

- We provide unique data visualisations and collections together with inventories and descriptions of organisations, projects, platforms and tools that map, track, document and visualise land issues.
- We aggregate and promote third-party land information and data, from around the world, which is carefully organised by country and theme for easy access and discovery.
- We map, explain and monitor key international land governance indicators including data and information related to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, and other international/regional frameworks for land monitoring.



# open

## Challenge #2

### Poorly managed data from local sources leaves vital information inaccessible and under-leveraged

Information derived from local groups and sources is less visible or accessible than that from mainstream sources, and is insufficiently used or under-represented in land governance policy-making. Likewise, local stakeholders and actors struggle to access data and information coming from external sources such as land policies or cadastral information.

Countless communities, organisations and individuals work on land governance issues across the globe, producing valuable data, information and stories. However, only a fraction of this valuable resource is made available and accessible to the wider world.

The lack of visibility of this information prevents land practitioners, researchers, campaigners and citizens from taking

informed decisions, monitoring policy implementation, scrutinising land investments, identifying and implementing good practices to improve land governance globally.

The rapid digitisation of information further increases the risk that vital knowledge will be overlooked (or deliberately set aside), as researchers and policy-makers rely on their familiar (mainstream) sources.

**Our response** to the siloed nature of land information and data is to democratise the ecosystem within which it exists; supporting the creation of a “standards-based data infrastructure” – a data infrastructure based on FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable) and open data principles – and building the capacity of information providers, to strengthen the flow of land governance information from all perspectives, at all levels.

We believe that quality data is that which represents a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. To ensure information from all sources is accessible and usable by others, we work to

improve the data-management practices of information providers and strengthen their capacity to make their information more discoverable on the web. Furthermore, we help design and manage the underlying data infrastructure that allows for information to flow freely, by promoting standards and implementing best practices.

**Our goal** is the creation of a democratised information ecosystem in which all perspectives are visible and equally valuable, where data and information can support positive change in land governance around the world.

### Key Activities

- We are currently undertaking country-level research into the many different sources of land data and information to understand the various information ecosystems in place, assess the availability of existing information and identify any gaps. This scoping study – called State of Land Information (SOLI) – addresses the need to look carefully at the complex dynamics of data-sharing at a local level. It is followed by an assessment of information accessibility, resulting in concrete recommendations for improving data-sharing practices.
  - We encourage the adoption of **FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable)** principles as a key step towards building a democratic information system that ensures diverse content can be easily found and accessed. We will continue to promote these principles through our various services, face-to-face workshops, online courses, tutorials and other methods.
  - We developed a land governance thesaurus – called **LandVoc** – to establish a common vocabulary for classifying data and information. Throughout the development process, our local partners worked closely with our team to review and enrich the vocabulary with locally-used terms and synonyms. We will continue to engage with academics, NGOs and government representatives to ensure that the vocabulary extends beyond technical terminology to reflect the scientific, psychological and political nature dimensions of land governance around the world.
- 

# debate

## Challenge #3

### Discussions around land governance exclude grassroots voices

Land governance is a politically-charged and highly sensitive cross-sectoral issue, which means the important discussions that affect people and communities – from urban and rural areas around the world – are rarely (if ever) held in open and participatory forums. In many places around the world, access to information equates to power, meaning the stakes are very high for those who speak out and challenge the status quo.

**Our response** to the lack of opportunities for people to discuss and share their perspectives and opinions on the complex issues surrounding land governance, has been to create virtual meeting spaces where all voices can be heard on land-related issues. We provide a range of services that promote debate, foster dialogue and support innovative storytelling techniques and approaches.

**Our goal** is to uncover and share knowledge that is otherwise not captured – in publications and official reports – through carefully facilitated online discussions and interactions that provide platforms for everyone, including marginalised communities, to share their experiences and articulate their perspectives.

#### Key Activities

- We organise and host regular webinars and online debates that provide unique opportunities for government officials, practitioners, academics, researchers, grassroots activists and students to debate and interact.
- We work with individuals and organisations from around the world, helping them to share their land-related stories with a global audience. Our efforts are particularly focussed on supporting those with perspectives that are typically unheard in land governance discussions and receive little or no international attention.

- We collect impact stories to critically assess how open data is helping to improve land rights, and where improvements can be made. Key questions we are exploring include: whether technology is beneficial to landless people and communities? Which communications platforms are best suited for engaging with key stakeholders on the land rights agenda? And what role the Land Portal should play in the future?
- We foster diverse media partnerships to raise awareness of land governance issues at international, regional and national levels. We also support our partner's media coverage by making local events more visible at the global level and bringing the debate outside the conference rooms to a global audience. We regularly attend land-related conferences to report on key trends and record interviews with individuals working on land governance in countries and communities across the globe.

The image shows three vertical bars of different colors and heights. The leftmost bar is dark teal and contains the word 'challenges' in white, oriented vertically. The middle bar is orange and contains the word 'responses' in white, oriented vertically. The rightmost bar is dark green and contains the word 'activities' in white, oriented vertically. The bars are positioned on the right side of the page, to the right of the main text area.

**challenges**

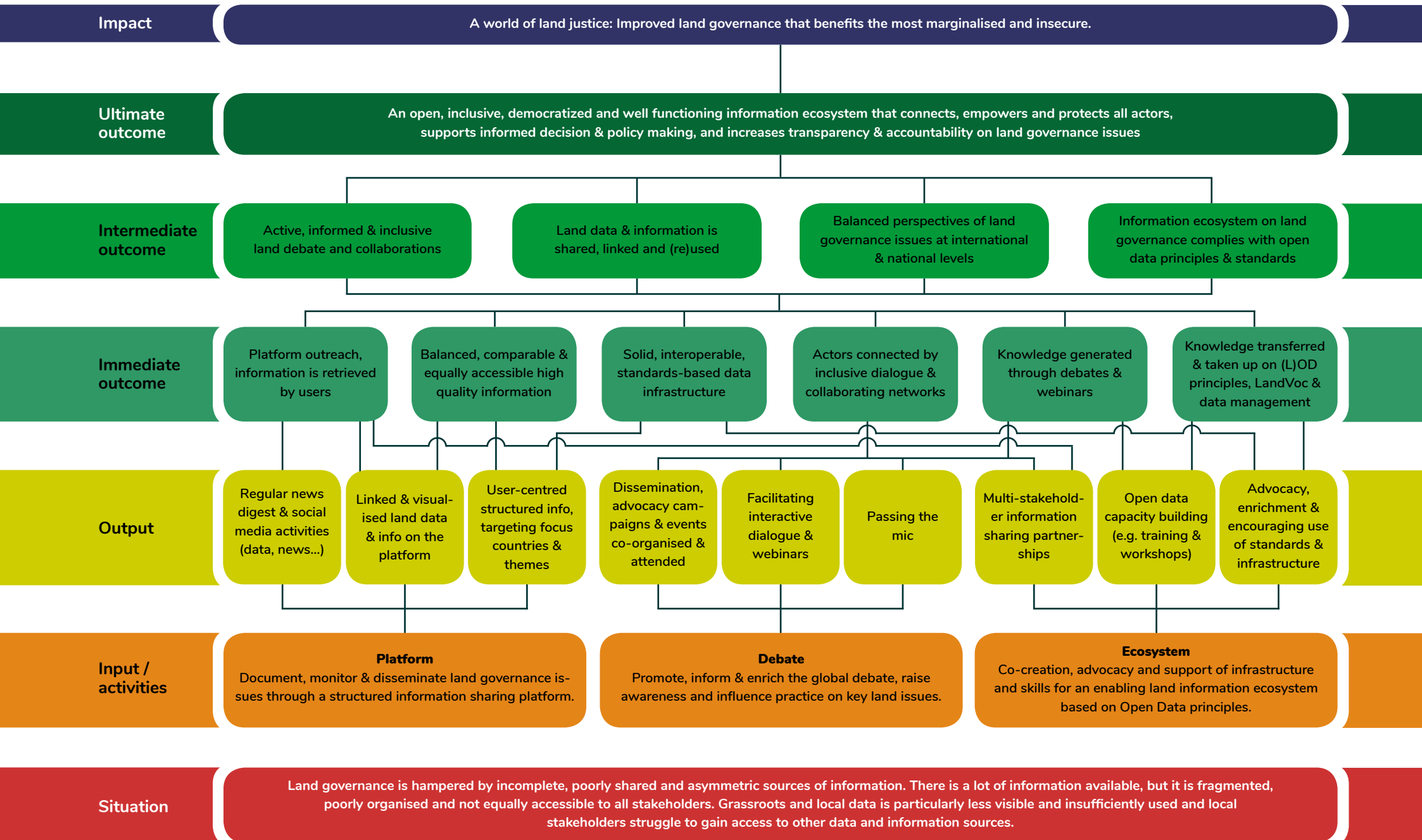
**responses**

**activities**

# theory of change

**The Land Portal's theory of change describes the logic behind our interventions, based on the following assumptions:**

- There is an increasing demand for more balanced, inclusive information on land governance to improve decision and policy-making.
- Responsible information providers will produce the required number of land resources.
- An open standards-based infrastructure increases discoverability, accessibility and interoperability, which will lead to increased use.
- A comprehensive and user oriented platform facilitates users' search for and use of relevant information whilst also showcasing new and cost effective ways of information sharing.
- Sharing high quality information and promoting discussion and collaboration will raise interest in and attention to themes, and specifically the emerging or neglected themes.
- Improved, standards-based information sharing capacity at all levels improves the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of the information environment for everyone.



# about us

The Land Portal began life in 2009 as a United Nations project dedicated to supporting the efforts of vulnerable rural communities to gain equitable access to land. In tracking basic elements of the various land tenure systems, the project began to address the fragmentation of information resources across the sector.

The Land Portal Foundation was registered in the Netherlands as an independent non-profit organisation in 2014. Today, the [Land Portal](#) is widely recognised for its role in pioneering and promoting the use of open data to improve land governance globally. The example it has established provides a clear, replicable strategy for using evidence effectively within program development, advocacy and policy-making to achieve improved land governance.

September 2019

