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Countries agree on global guidelines on responsible land rights at UN-hosted talks



Farmers water spinach in their vegetable garden. Photo: IFAD/GMB Akash

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Ninety-six countries, along with non-governmental, private, and civil society organizations, have reached a consensus on a set of global guidelines on responsible access to and ownership of land, fisheries and forests during talks convened by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) in Rome.

The guidelines cover a wide range of issues including the promotion of equal rights for women in securing land ownership, the creation of transparent accountability systems, and giving land access to the rural poor.

Calling it a “milestone achievement,” FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva congratulated participants, adding that the guidelines “will play an important part in answering the challenge of ending hunger and assuring food security of every child, woman and man in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way.”

The voluntary guidelines have been developed over the past three years in consultation with governments, civil society, farmers’ associations and the private sector, among other actors, and take into account current factors affecting land rights such as population growth, urbanization, increased competition for land, and large-scale purchases of farmland by domestic and foreign investors.

According to a [news release](#) issued by FAO today, the proposed guidelines will now be subject to final approval from the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) during a session in mid-May.

“Once approved, the guidelines will be voluntary, but because they have been drawn up in such a comprehensive and inclusive process, and because there is this shared perception that a framework like this is sorely needed, we all anticipate that they will set the bar for policymakers,” said Yaya Olaniran, current chair of CFS. “In fact, we’re already seeing governments moving to bring their policies and practices into alignment with the guidelines,” he added.

The guidelines are intended to serve as an authoritative reference for national authorities when passing laws and setting policies on access and ownership of land, fisheries, and forests. They are also meant to give investors and developers clear indications on best practices and to provide civil society groups with benchmarks they can use in their work on behalf of rural communities.

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