



Report

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

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Aims and Organization of the Meeting

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 Arab Land Initiative's key areas of work. This partnership is part of a broader programme on land governance in the Arab region funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The study is benefiting from the input of the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty (ANFS)³. As part of this regional study, APN organised an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) bringing together specialists from different countries and areas of expertise to share knowledge on the land and conflict nexus. The conference addressed land-related causes of conflict and the effect of conflict on land.

¹ GLTN 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.

² APN 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.

³ ANFS 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. Its members strive to build consensus on and advocate for regional and global agricultural and environmental issues.

The meeting's objectives were to encourage and strengthen information sharing among a network of local and international experts and civil society organizations, and to describe, discuss and evaluate specific land-related conflicts (LRC) in the Arab countries. In preparation for the sessions, experts produced national case studies identifying structural causes of LRCs with an attention to key global frameworks.

Furthermore, existing tools and approaches to address, mitigate and event LRCs, already used in other regions of the world were presented and considered for application in the Arab region. More particularly, the GLTN Root Cause Analysis Framework of Land and Conflict was introduced, which will be part of the methodological approach adopted by the aforementioned study. The meetings concluded with participants sharing a series of recommendations to prevent and solve land-related conflicts at the local and regional levels. The event underscored the importance of coherent engagement on issues of land to achieve the SDGs, sustain peace, promote social equality and ensure regional sovereignty.

The virtual event was targeted to scholars, practitioners and community organizers working in the field of land and conflict, who APN and ANFS reached to following a thorough mapping exercise. 85 invitees from 22 countries (including 12 from the Arab region) registered to participate in the event. The following sections provide synthetic discussions of the sessions' content and the main take-aways per topic and state the names and affiliations of the different experts involved.

Introductory Remarks

The initial portion of the meeting presented the impetus for the gathering and established a common purpose among participants by explaining the complexity, scale, and importance of regional land-based conflict and the APN/GLTN study seeking to map out its contours through the event's inputs.

OPENING SESSION

Facilitated by: Razan Zuayter (President – Arab Network for Food Sovereignty)

Welcoming Remarks

Mariam Al Jaajaa (General Manager – Arab Group for the Protection of Nature)

Mariam Al Jaajaa opened the conference by explaining the current state of decision-making regarding issues of land and conflict in the Arab region. She noted that fair and equitable decisions over land are key to the region, as abundant land-related stressors make it a festering ground for conflict and prevent development. However, she explained that affected vulnerable communities are often absent from discussions and decisions, and on a broader level, that the voice of the region is largely missing from international policy platforms where decisions and programs are often led by international actors. She highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and adhering to a rights-based approach in decreasing conflicts related to land. She expressed her hopes that the gathering would assist in building a network of experts to analyse the external and internal factors leading to land-related conflict (LRC) rooted in accurate information and an understanding of the historical context of the region. She

presented the meeting as a way to analyse issues and express concerns at the local and regional levels, understand the variety of opinions on related issues, and close the gap for others with conflicting interests to fill.

Al Jaajaa then introduced the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN) and its role in promoting food sovereignty and country ownership in food policy, which are deeply interrelated with issues concerning land. APN also carries out planting activities and support to small-scale farmers in Jordan and Palestine to promote ecological health, sustainable livelihoods, and political, as well as food, sovereignty. Al Jaajaa explained that the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty was established to unify similar efforts across the region and establish regional positions and common ground on land and agriculture issues.

Introduction to the Arab Land Initiative

Ombretta Temptra (Human Settlements Officer – UN-Habitat/ GLTN)

Ombretta Temptra provided an overview of challenges that make the region prone to LRC. She cited several factors that increase the risk of conflict: an incapacity to manage urban expansion, especially on agricultural land; a high rate of population growth; wealth inequality and unequal land distribution; poor governance, particularly in the management of natural resources for sustainable inclusive development; and gender inequality. These stressors also hinder countries' efforts to emerge from LRC and highlight the urgency of forming or rebuilding strong land governance systems.

Ombretta introduced the Arab Land Initiative and its mission in promoting good land governance. The Initiative aims to achieve equal and affordable access to land, stability, and growth through the promotion and support of good land policies and transparent, efficient and affordable land administration. It seeks to achieve this vision through enhanced collaboration and coordination between different land sector institutions and partners working at the national, regional, and international levels.

Introduction to Land and Conflict in the Arab Region

Rami Zurayk (Senior Technical Consultant – APN/Professor- AUB)

Rami Zurayk asserted the need to take a historical perspective grounded in analysis of political economy to understand the relationship between land and conflict. He explained that international media dictates a certain stereotype of Arabs, as people living in or always seeking war. This Orientalist trope precludes historical analysis of why the region has suffered so many LRCs. He added that one of the real reasons behind LRCs is the area's natural resource wealth and the colonial powers who have entered the region to enact their own agendas for resource extraction and control over land. Present-day governments have kept in place some of these policies that have served to reinforce the land as a commodity—even a speculative commodity. Zurayk highlighted how capitalist capture of resources plays a similar function as occupation and has altered the conversation from land management to land ownership. He also noted that regional difficulties wrought by export-oriented economies, a hallmark of capitalist resource capture, are not new, and have a history of triggering food system collapse, including in Ottoman-era Lebanon when silk displaced food production. To end his welcoming speech, Zurayk presented the EGM as an opportunity to evade simple narratives about the region and apply a holistic and historically grounded analysis that delves deep into the root causes of current land conflict.

Background on Land and Conflict

This portion of the meeting offered participants a common language with which to think through and discuss the material presented at the event. It provided several views on the common roots of land-based conflict, applicable across the different case studies to come, including the analytical methodology used by the GLTN. This part of the event also included an explanation of international efforts to address the drivers and manifestations of land-based conflict through treaties, conventions, and other frameworks. This background also contributed to the foundation of the forthcoming typology of land and conflict for which the EGM was hosted in preparation.

SESSION 1: FRAMEWORKS AND CONCEPTS

Facilitated by Hala Murad (President of the Dibeen Association for Environmental Development in Jordan)

The Structural Causes and Global Origins of Land-Related Conflicts in the Arab Region

Max Ajl (Post-doctoral Researcher – Rural Sociology Group- Wageningen University)

Max Ajl outlined three classical variations of the “agrarian question”: What are the choices parties have with reference to changing the position of the peasants? What is the nature of capitalist development in agriculture and what are its implications for the peasantry? What is the role of agricultural surplus in industrialization? Each of these questions holds contemporary relevance, however, Ajl argues that they have traditionally been limited to national frameworks that ignore global processes of accumulation. This omission stems from the questions’ origins in Western countries which had already amassed land and resource surpluses through colonisation. Ajl argues that agrarian conflict in the Arab region and elsewhere takes the form of localized class conflict in the context of this global phenomenon.

To map out the relationship between local and global processes, Ajl proposes a new agrarian question that asks about land, nation, and national sovereignty over productive resources. Indeed, he explains “the agrarian question of nation” is not new but the main question posed by African and Asian liberation struggles seeking to gain sovereign control over their resources. However, its application holds renewed relevance in analysing the widespread use of war as a tool to accomplish mass accumulation through the destruction of non-Western countries. This is reflected in Ajl’s description of much of the region as weakened/destroyed countries surrounding stable bases of extraction, either in settler colonies like Israel or in oil-rich Gulf countries, each of which rely on the destruction of the Arab peasantry to operate smoothly.

Ajl gave three examples of regional conflicts (in Yemen, Palestine, and Syria) where the language of terror and conflict obscures the central issue of external intervention into sovereign control over productive resources. He explained that each of these governments is unable to mobilize their resources for popular development, apart from any internal issues they face due to the impacts of colonial expansion and accumulation. He argued that in analysing land conflicts, we must first ask who has control over productive resources and if resource mobilization is prevented by externally-imposed war. Only after addressing these dimensions can internal questions of egalitarian resource distribution prove

fruitful. He argued that while agrarian conflicts cannot be analysed within the framework of national sovereignty alone—given dictatorships, internal capitalism, gender, and ecological issues—the national framework remains the most important as it overdetermines how these other struggles will play out.

Some participants challenged Ajl's prioritization of state sovereignty over peoples' sovereignty, pointing to the existence of many regional land movements against the state and the replication of colonial policies by post-colonial governments. Ajl addressed these critiques by explaining that the liberated state should not be seen as the arbiter of all internal land conflict but as the space in which conflict can be resolved. One participant countered that without political and institutional legitimacy a state cannot take on this role. Another participant argued that a primary function of the nation state is to evade indigenous claims to rights and resources. Ajl affirmed the centrality of minority and indigenous land struggles, while also warning that internal land conflicts can be used to benefit imperial encroachment and pointed to the need to further understand how to resolve such conflicts while avoiding this outcome.

Overview of Key Relevant Global Frameworks on Land and Conflict

Clarissa Augustinus (Independent Senior Consultant – United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification)

Clarissa Augustinus presented relevant international policy frameworks that tie together land, environment, and conflict and noted that analysing how and where frameworks have been adapted to a national context allows stakeholders to negotiate for conflict-sensitive land governance. The presentation focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN Secretary General's Guidance Note on Land and Conflict, the VGGTs, and the UN Rio Conventions.

SDG Indicators: Augustinus noted that countries can choose to sign on to particular indicators. Several indicators within the SDGs are highly relevant to land and conflict, such as:

- SDG1.4.2 tracks the proportion of the total adult population with secure tenure rights (under SDG 1 on poverty elimination)
- SDG5.a tracks the proportion of women with secure rights to agricultural land and the proportion of countries with legal frameworks that guarantee equal rights to land ownership and/or control (under SDG5 on gender equality)
- SDG15 works to protect and restore ecosystems while promoting their sustainable use
- SDG16.3 promotes the rule of law at the national and international levels and seeks to ensure equal access to justice (under SDG16 on peace and justice)

Secretary General's Guidance Note on Land and Conflict: The note, written to instruct UN agencies and staff, identifies 15 root causes of conflict as well as relevant human rights standards/ international humanitarian law in an appendix. These include prohibitions on the destruction, occupation, and sale of properties of refugees and IDPs and special protections for the natural environment and cultural property.

VGGTs (Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security): The VGGTs seek to improve the governance of tenure of land, fisheries, and forestry and look at access to justice and conflict prevention.

UN Rio Conventions: Augustinus described the following three conventions as potentially useful entry points for advocacy, as land use is heavily tied to environmental outcomes. (For example, changes in land use account for a quarter of global emissions).

- UN Convention to Combat Desertification
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- UN Convention on Biological Diversity

Augustinus also listed two other regional guidelines relating to land:

- Arab Charter on Human Rights (Arts. 25, 31, 38)
- Cairo Declaration on Human rights in Islam (Art. 15)

Augustinus discussed the positive evolution from the recognition and protection of formally recorded ownership rights to the rights of all legitimate tenure holders. This shift is reflected in the SDGs and VGGTs. The UN-HABITAT New Urban Agenda also created a new clause around security of tenure for all, recognition of the plurality of tenure types, and the need for fit-for-purpose solutions to land rights issues that take into account age, gender, and the environment.

Augustinus discussed the UN's role in housing, land, and property (HLP) issues explaining the distinction between UN missions (funded by UN Security council) and non-missions (consisting of recovery and rehabilitation/technical assistance). While the UN Security Council has never allocated mission funding to land per se, HLP issues are often a part of wider programs. For instance, peacekeeping missions may physically secure peoples' land rights, support mediation between conflicting parties, and work on supporting capable and responsive state institutions and robust community engagement.

Augustinus recommended stakeholders analyse what is being done at the national level and then use global frameworks to place issues on the negotiating table. She promoted the clear identification of root causes and the formation of coalitions to communicate simple messages to governments, international bodies, and investors. She also mentioned that considering land, conflict, and environment issues and standards together can open more channels for advocacy.

SESSION 2: ANALYSING AND RESPONDING TO LAND RELATED CONFLICTS

Facilitated by: Reem Nejdawi (Chief of Food and Environment Policies Section-UNESCWA)

Examples of Causes of Land Conflicts

Babette Wehrmann (Lecturer and Land Governance Expert)

Wehrmann explained that land conflicts typically are made up of many interrelated causes. She listed:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| ● Political causes and interests | ● Legal and juridical causes |
| ● Economic and financial causes and interests | ● Administrative causes |
| ● Socioeconomic causes | ● Technical causes |
| ● Sociocultural causes | ● Ecological causes |
| ● Demographic causes | ● Criminality, corruption, fraud |
| | ● Psychological motivation |

Wehrmann explained that land conflicts are often overattributed to weak land management. She pointed to the existence of weak land systems with few LRC and strong systems with deep LRC, concluding that weak land management is a catalyst or enabler of conflict rather than a root cause. Land

governance becomes salient when actors take advantage of its shortcomings, ignore functioning land systems, or, if they are particularly powerful, manipulate land management and administration to meet their own interests.

Wehrmann outlined two major goals of land governance—securing and regulating property rights—and the areas of administration related to each:

Objective	Area of land administration and management
Securing property rights Security of tenure	<u>Land administration</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land rights recognition • Land registration • Land information systems • Land valuation • Expropriation and compensation
Required base:	• Rule of law
Regulating property rights Sustainable land use	<u>Land management</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use planning • Land readjustment • Land consolidation • Buffer zone management
Required base:	• Common ethical principles

Successful land governance in all its forms requires sufficient numbers of well-trained, skilled, and uncorrupt staff, political will, strong policy and laws, clear regulation, and, ultimately, implementation. Wehrmann explained that land conflicts can accelerate and become recurrent in the absence of any of these aspects.

Wehrmann explained that at the heart of land conflicts lie people acting out of individual self-interests, which must be addressed to prevent or emerge from conflict. These interests derive from material and emotional needs, themselves stemming from psychological motivations, all of which can change with altered conditions such as new policies, economic crisis, droughts/natural disasters, war, migratory pressures, etc. (*see figure 1*). She was careful to point out that greed, as well as need, can be a source of motivation. Wehrmann argued that attributing a crisis to economic or political factors alone does not capture the way people participate in crises on the ground. The focus on individual people also gives a window for institutions to consider conflict resolution through the fulfillment of peoples' unmet needs. Therefore, Wehrmann argued, conflict analysis should consider these needs alongside the reasons for potentially weak land governance and the general political, economic, social, demographic, legal, and ecological situation.

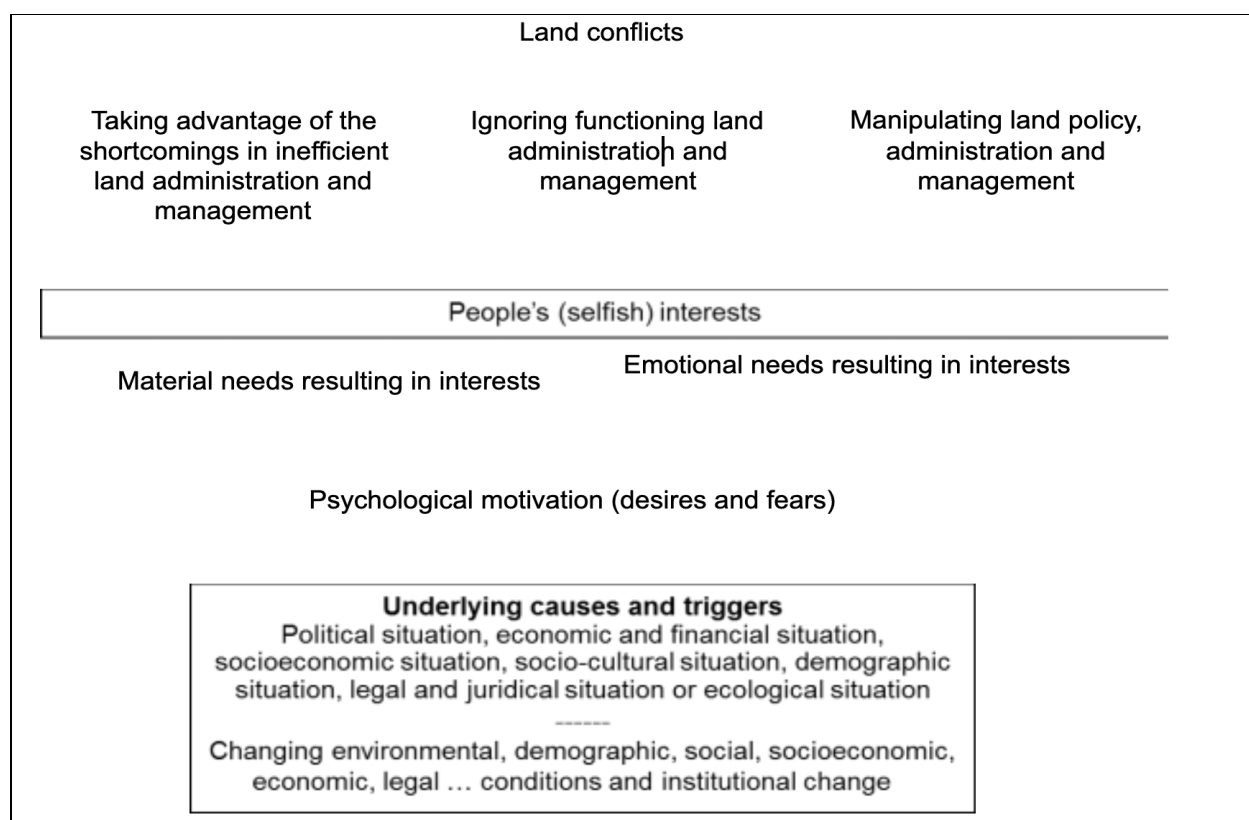


Figure 1: Wehrmann's explanation of how land conflicts manifest.

DISCUSSION RELATING TO CAUSES OF LAND CONFLICTS

One participant asked how to counter individual interests to ensure equitable access to land and peace. Wehrmann responded that greed over land often stems primarily from a desire for increased power. Particularly when personnel responsible for land management are seizing land, alternative sources of power can be granted to quell land conflict, for example, through the creation of a new official title or position. She explained that this goes against most conceptions of justice but is sometimes one of the only ways to prevent conflict.

Several people stated that land conflicts cannot be reduced to interpersonal struggles over ownership but often lie in structural oppression and deliberate public policy, such as in Palestine. Another participant argued that greed cannot be disassociated from the dominant economic regime of capitalist accumulation. This idea that economic structures drive the affective elements of conflict reverses the idea that individual motivations constitute structures and place a different target for effective interventions into land conflict.

Root Cause Analysis of Land and Conflict: A Methodological Approach to Land-Related Conflicts

Ombretta Tempra (Human Settlements Officer – UN-Habitat/ GLTN)

Tempra explained that many conflict analyses do not address the land components of crises, which has limited the efficacy and longevity of solutions. This is despite the fact that land issues have been

identified in key UN documents as a root cause of violent conflict. In response to this gap, in 2017, the GLTN developed “The Root Cause Analysis Framework of Land and Conflict.” The tool is in the form of a table (*see figure 2*) that correlates root causes of LRCs to proximate factors and examples of triggers. Separating these three different issues helps develop clarity and build consensus on conflict analysis. This tool complements pre-existing conflict analysis tools and mirrors much of the content of the UN Secretary General’s Guidance Note on Land and Conflict. Tempura explained that it is useful for developing short to long-term recommendations and for presenting solutions to policymakers.

ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT	EXAMPLES OF LAND-RELATED PROXIMATE FACTORS	EXAMPLES OF LAND-RELATED TRIGGERS
1. Weak governance	Dysfunctional land administration systems and weak capacity of land-related institutions; Inability to solve land-related disputes;	Displaced population settlements and/or returns after wars;
2. Capture of state instruments	Capture of state land institutions and records for political and/or financial purposes	Grabs of state land
3. Politics of exclusion	Land grabbing by a group in power	Actions to displace ethnic / religious groups; Elections or coups;
4. Population pressure	Large-scale land scarcity; Youth bulge without secure land rights	Displacement and migration; Food insecurity, famine;
5. Poverty	Homelessness and slums prevalence; Unequal access to land; Historical discriminations against the poor; Food insecurity because of limited access to land for livelihood opportunities	Land grabbing by the state of indigenous/ customary land.
6. Economic and political competition between global and/or regional power blocks	Competition between countries and their investors for productive land in other countries; Transnational conflict leading to flows of refugees, illegal natural resources and arms between countries	Land grabs by investors linked to armed groups and/or national interests; Refugee/ IDP migration; Armed insurgencies
7. Nation State fragmentation	Identity groups grab land from other ethnic / religious groups	Invasion of territory
8. Criminality	Revenue from land and natural resources used by criminals linked to rebel groups	International criminals moving into the area
9. Plural legal systems	Competition over the use of natural resources between private investors and indigenous groups and their group forms of land rights	Expansion of control of national institutions into local indigenous/customary area to the detriment of local communities
10. Scarce natural resources including land	Population pressures and competition over increasingly scarce resources including land; Scarcity of usable land;	Desertification; Natural disaster (mudslides, flooding, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis...)
11. Natural Resource exploitation	Armed groups control land for natural resource extraction to fund their insurgency	Rebel movements. Investors.
12. Water scarcity	Land is indirectly part of many disputes linked to water access and allocation	Clean water shortages
13. Exploitative trade and investment	Inadequate land laws to manage the demand for state land by investors and no protection for occupants on the state land.	Investors acquiring land to the detriment of vulnerable ones
14. Chaotic urbanization	Migration puts pressure on host communities for infrastructure and services supply, land and rental markets, shortage of housing and accommodation.	Refugee, IDP flows and migration and rapid urban population growth.
15. Weak land administration and management	Denial of access, use, or control of land; Competing land claims; Land grabs; Weak land dispute resolution mechanisms	Elections or coups; Land grabs; Establishment of large infrastructure that impacts large number of people (e.g. dams); Politicization and manipulation of land disputes

Figure 2: GLTN Root Causes of Conflict and Land as a Proximate Factor and/or Trigger, from p.6 of “How to Do a Root Cause Analysis of Land and Conflict for Peace Building” (2018).

Tempra talked through the application of this framework to the case of Jubaland, Somalia, where the tool was applied to identify environmental causes (natural resources exploitation & scarce natural resources including fertile land and water), socioeconomic causes (population pressure, poverty, criminality, and terrorism & unregulated and exploitative investment), and governance-related causes (weak governance, weak land administration, politics of exclusion, capture of state instruments & chaotic urbanisation). Later, in conversation, one participant challenged this analysis, asking whether the situation could better be explained by examining the driving factors behind Somalia's lack of state institutions and status as a "failed state." Nonetheless, Tempra showed how this level of conflict analysis can lead to recommendations, presenting the following chart on the environmental components of land conflict in Jubaland:

ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT	LAND-RELATED PROXIMATE FACTORS	TRIGGERS OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS	LAND-RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL			
<p><i>Scarce natural resources including land and water;</i></p> <p><i>Natural resources exploitation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Scarcity of land for pastures & unsustainable increase of livestock;</i> ▪ <i>Unrecognized and undefined land rights of pastoralist communities;</i> ▪ <i>Breakdown of governance systems controlling the use of natural resources;</i> ▪ <i>Increasing inadequacy of Xeer Law and its implementation mechanisms related to use of land and water;</i> ▪ <i>Private livestock enclosures, excluding others from using land perceived as communal;</i> ▪ <i>Environmental degradation & destruction of the environment by charcoal production.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Droughts;</i> ▪ <i>Destruction of farms by livestock;</i> ▪ <i>Excessive consumption of water or pasture by a group to the detriment of another;</i> ▪ <i>Destruction of grazing land by charcoal producers.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Assess the capacity of the territory to sustain livestock, farming and charcoal production;</i> ▪ <i>Undertake participatory demarcation of migratory routes;</i> ▪ <i>Define & recognize community rights of pastoralists and rural communities;</i> ▪ <i>Strengthen land dispute resolution mechanisms;</i> ▪ <i>Mitigate the impact of droughts, especially in conflict-prone areas;</i>

Tempra explained how UN-HABITAT used this analytic tool to work on securing land rights for Yazidi communities in Sinjar, northern Iraq. These communities were never given protected, recognised, or registered land rights and have suffered multiple displacements, most recently by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Using the tool, she identified the root causes as a politics of exclusion and capture of state instruments, insofar as Yazidis were denied the right to access the state land registry. She listed land grabbing and a lack of access to land registration as respective proximate factors.

UN-HABITAT addressed these root causes by supporting Yazidi return through the mapping and documentation of property rights. It dealt with unresolved claims through a participatory approach using the [Social Tenure Domain Model](#) to digitally map the land and seek endorsements from the community and local authorities. It provided property certificates to male and female beneficiaries and worked with the government to begin the process of formalizing these documents into the official land registry. UN-HABITAT also carried out mediations, mediation training, legal assistance to displaced/returning persons, and support for restitution and reconstruction. This process resolved both systemic root cause issues and household-level disputes. Mediation efforts resolved 86% of addressed cases and documentation efforts led to the first property documents most families had ever received. In total, the programme reached over 37,000 people.

Tempra explained that such a programme illustrates “fit-for-purpose” land administration that can fill gaps with interim measures while state capacity is increased. The programme was able to respond flexibly and rapidly through participatory mapping and the issuance of informal land documentation while supporting that documentation’s ultimate inclusion in the formal land registry and preventing the subversion of existing Iraqi land governance.

GLTN publications related to root cause analysis can be found in the *References* section at the end of the report.

Land Related Conflicts: Case Studies from the Arab Region

The majority of the event was devoted to examining eleven case studies of land-related conflict and the effect of conflict on land from locations within nine countries in the Arab region. These studies grounded the prior theories of conflict shared and gave participants material with which to develop and test their theories on conflict. Case studies were identified for their contextual breadth along with their geographical breadth, involving cases of colonial occupation, state-tribal disputes, international and civil war, localized land planning disputes and more. The analysis of these conflicts provided the germ for the forthcoming typology of land and conflict for which the EGM was hosted in preparation.

SESSIONS 3: CASE STUDIES FROM SYRIA, PALESTINE, AND MOROCCO

Case Study from Syria: Land Administration and its Role for Reaching Food Safety and Peacebuilding

Roula Maya (Professor of Sociology – University of Sharjah)

Maya started her presentation by giving an overview of events constructing the current humanitarian crisis in Syria including ten years of war with no political solution in sight, ten years of preceding drought, and the current COVID-19 induced pressures on food security and the economy.

From 2000-2010, Syria experienced waves of drought, particularly in the north. In 2009, ASCAD announced an early warning for desertification, labeling 68% of Syrian land as susceptible. This period saw the deterioration of lands, flora, and fauna, and communities’ living conditions. In Northeast Syria, around 60,000 families of farmers left their lands and vocations due to drought. This period saw an increase in food insecurity and poverty. Several participants later asserted that one of the main factors

that contributed to the shortage of irrigation water was the reduction of Syria's share of Euphrates water due to Turkish exploitation.

Food insecurity and other weak development indicators contributed to trigger the war, which itself exacerbated hunger and brought destruction at all levels. Currently, amid reduced food production, 9.3 million Syrians are food insecure and one million suffer extreme food insecurity. The war has also left 400,000 people dead and 2 million wounded and created 5.5 million refugees. Maya estimated that Syria has lost more than 30 years of development.

The national poverty level has risen to over 80%. Additional economic challenges facing the country include increased unemployment, rises in fuel and food prices, and a dramatic currency depreciation linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic crisis in Lebanon and wide-ranging international sanctions have also impacted the Syrian people.

In terms of land-specific challenges, Maya outlined urbanization and land degradation. Around 55% of Syrians now live in urban areas, which is partially due to the internal displacement of 3.2 million people from the war. Rapid urbanization is putting pressure on already overwhelmed infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and housing units, which have all suffered immense wartime damages. Maya also linked urbanization to a decrease in agricultural production.

The second half of Maya's presentation focused on the current land administration system in Syria. Improved land administration is a common solution to environmental and social problems, including poverty, food insecurity, and inequality, suggested by UN frameworks and international organizations such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

On paper, Syrian land planning extends to the local, regional, and national levels. However, in practice, regional planning is absent and there is little coordination between the national and local levels. This is because the Regional Planning Commission is affiliated to the Ministry of Local Planning, which implements master plans from a technical rather than developmental perspective and limits its purview to urban areas. This underlines inequality and inefficiency in the current land administration systems.

At the local level, people register their real estate with the General Directorate for Cadastral Affairs (related to the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment), however, all property records from before 2011 are inexistent and many cadasters are missing. Maya also explained that gaps exist in the work of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform due to a lack of coordination and duplicative efforts by different entities leading to unclear results. These institutions lack the systems and tools for comprehensive and effective land administration.

Based on her legal, spatial and institutional analysis of Syrian land administration and its weaknesses, Maya identified three main recommendations: a national programme for urban/rural agriculture implemented with enhanced public participation, the reform of tenure systems and laws, and the development and strengthening of institutional capacity in the sector. She argued that a stronger land administration system, coupled with proper investments in both rural and urban land, would encourage rural and urban agriculture to improve local people's livelihoods.

Maya ended her presentation by stating that cooperation between the local, national, regional, and international levels is required to ensure peacebuilding and the wellbeing and prosperity of all in Syria.

Case study on Palestine: Jordan Valley

Rahaf Rifai (Development and Resource Mobilization Officer – Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees)

Rahaf Rifai placed the beginning of the land conflict in Palestine around 100 years ago, with waves of Zionist immigration. In 1948, with the establishment of Israel, Palestinians were deprived of their lands and forcibly displaced in the Nakba. In 1967, 300,000 Palestinians were displaced when Israeli forces took control of the rest of the Palestinian territories. She noted the role of the 1993 Oslo Accords in shaping the conflict. Though one of the goals of the Accords was the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, they lay the groundwork for the division of the West Bank into Area A (18% of the West Bank), Area B (22%), and Area C (60%). Area C is under full Israeli civil and military control.

The largest designation, Area C is primarily dedicated to Israeli settlements. Before the Oslo agreements, around 4,000 new settlers moved to the West Bank each year; now there are around 12,000 new settlers each year. Currently, there are 150 settlements and 500,000 Israeli settlers. Most open land and natural resources are in Area C, which cannot be used by Palestinians. Many Palestinians in Area C lack access to water and the electricity grid, as well as to education, shelter, and humanitarian aid. All construction projects must be approved by the Israeli Civil Administration (which approves 5% of petitions), leading to informal building, demolitions, and displacements.

Rifai described the importance of the Jordan Valley, an area that the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publically considered formally annexing in 2019 and 2020. It is very fertile, comprising 55% of Palestinian agricultural lands, supporting year-round planting, and producing 60% of Palestinian vegetable production. The Valley produces USD 3.4 billion in annual revenue, and the World Bank considers it key to a sustainable economy, highlighting its high significance at the local level. However, the Valley is territorially fragmented: 88% is under Area C, and the rest is divided between Areas A and B. This leaves many villages in the Valley separated from one another and from external villages. This is because travel between areas A, B, and C is heavily controlled by a network of military checkpoints. The Palestinian Authority has also divided the Valley into multiple governorates. Before the occupation, there were 320,000 residents; now due to the occupation's systematic annexation efforts, there are 11,000 settlers and just 50,000 Palestinian residents.

Some of the occupation's methods of land seizure include the creation of military zones and over fifty nature reserves. The occupation also targets Palestinian agriculture through restrictions on grazing, tight control over inputs and outputs by imposing dependency on Israeli goods. The occupation also uproots fruit trees and other crops, sometimes as part of a process to first clear land for military training and then to place landholdings into the control of settlements.

Rifai also described widespread physical attacks by settlers seeking to drive farmers off their land. She characterized these often armed settlers as an extension of the occupying state. Rifai named the occupation as the root cause of this crisis, without which there would be no settlements or settler violence. She named complementary factors including settlers' legal impunity and the risk Palestinians face in protecting themselves, underwritten by an apartheid legal system of military law applied to Palestinians and civil law to settlers.

In 2016, 9% of investigations into settler violence led to prosecution, with light sentences for settlers found guilty. She explained that many cases are never even reported, let alone investigated, due to a mistrust in the law, the inaccessibility to legal authorities located inside settlements, and cases of retaliation against farmers who file complaints.

To resolve this root cause, Rifai recommended advocacy campaigns and popular resistance in the Jordan Valley, paired with agitation for effective accountability mechanisms to respond to violations of international law, including through involvement with the International Criminal Court. Rifai also recommended the development of an improved economic strategy for the Palestinian agricultural sector to reduce the dominance of Israeli produce and enhance local production. She noted that civil society plays a key role in resisting the occupation and has even been able to reclaim land.

Case study on Palestine: A Century of Colonial Land Policy in Palestine

Elle Ambler (Research and Advocacy Officer – The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature)

Ambler pointed to the legal continuity of Zionist colonisation from the aftermath of the Nakba through to today. The passage of the Absentee Property Law in 1950, which gave the state control over the property of Palestinian refugees, and the Land Acquisition Law in 1953, which retroactively endorsed land seized directly after the Nakba and lay the groundwork for more seizures for development or security, turned around 5 million dunums of land into state land.

After the Naksa, when Israel occupied the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, it issued similar military orders. A 1967 order placed land into the holdings of the military's Custodian for Government and Abandoned Property (Custodian) in cases where lands belonged to Palestinians who fled in the Naksa, left afterward, or were "unknown. Many of those who fled were blacklisted from re-entering Palestine and claiming their property. The occupation also took land registered to the Government of Jordan and sequestered land for military use.

Sequestration orders were the main strategy for taking land for settlements, until, in 1979, a rare rebuke from the Israeli Supreme Court led the occupation to begin building all settlements on "state land." "State land" was a category introduced by the British Mandate but never applied to more than very specific properties. Today state lands are used for many purposes including settlements, settler access roads, military bases, and firing zones.

To expand this new "state land" category, the occupation looked back in time to the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 (OLC). Through significant alterations to the Code—as well as interventions on the ground—about 40% of the West Bank was turned into "state land" by means of the OLC alone. The OLC has 5 categories, the two of which are *mewat* lands, freely cultivable lands, located far from villages without a history of

cultivation, and *miri* lands, which include farmlands whose usage rights belong to their cultivators. The occupation considers all *mewat* land and most *miri* land to be “state land,” arguing that the Sultan’s formal title over these lands justifies their transfer to the Custodian. This expands the reach of potential state land to most of the West Bank while ignoring that in each OLC category, usage rights were distinguished from the Sultan’s formal title.

This distinction is particularly important when it comes to Article 68, which states that after three years of disuse, the Sultan will reallocate *miri* land to another farmer. This provision was to ensure active farming and steady tax revenue. When the occupation applies the OLC, it holds a very different incentive: instead of trying to increase the cultivation of *miri* land, the occupation seeks to turn *miri* land fallow, and through a misapplication of Article 68, not reappoint it, but seize it as “state land.” While different policies give different timelines for when fallow land can be seized under Article 68 (often, but not always three years), the State Attorney’s Office has simply stated “what is not registered and is not cultivated *miri* land is state land.” Today, almost all “state land” is area C. State land declarations target strategic areas, attempting to divide the north and south of the West Bank and separate off Jerusalem.

Ambler noted three other changes made to the OLC by the occupation. Under Article 78, farmers were given rights to *miri* land cultivated for ten years. The British Mandate ruled that *miri* land rights obtained through Article 78 could not be revoked even if they fell fallow (recognizing *miri* land’s *de facto* private ownership). The occupation ignores this ruling. Indeed, a 1984 military order invalidated all Palestinian land claims based on pre-1967 cultivation and ordered that all post-1967 cultivation be accompanied by ownership documents. Another example is Article 103, which gave farmers the right to rehabilitated *mewat* lands. Under the occupation, planting to establish ownership on *mewat* land is now illegal. Ambler also mentioned the 5% rule used against Palestinian farmers. Under the OLC, Palestinians are entitled to rights to lands cultivated “*as is reasonably possible*,” meaning that scattered plantings on rocky lands would still confer use rights. Under the occupation, if a total parcel is less than 50% cultivated, the entire piece is deemed state land, while if it’s over 50% cultivated, the cultivated part is separated and the rocky area is deemed state land.

Policies put in place to discourage cultivation under this legal framework led to a 40% decline in agricultural production in just 6 years following the occupation’s reinstatement of the OLC. Today, around one-fifth of West Bank Palestinians are food insecure, and Palestine imports over 80% of its staple commodities, mostly from Israel.

The occupation claims to recognise land registrations, creating a semblance of legality. However, no more than a third of the West Bank was ever registered. Instead, people held communal understandings of property boundaries. The Ottomans began land registration, but records were imprecise as they were for taxation purposes and often covered communal lands. The British Mandate continued registrations, as part of breaking up communal, *musha’a* lands into private plots. This destruction of communal lands was met with resistance and slowed registration. Directly after the occupation of the West Bank, military order No. 291 suspended all land registration. Today, the occupation focuses on unregistered areas to seize, however, settlements are also routinely built on privately owned, registered land.

Ambler described the many obstacles Palestinians face in protecting their land under the military legal system. To file an appeal, Palestinians must go to the “Objection Committee,” made up of members appointed by the military and operating as an explicitly extrajudicial body that “*shall not be bound by the laws of evidence and judicial proceedings*.” To file a complaint Palestinians must: file within 45 days (despite often being informed of land seizure orders too late), pay a fee, and provide a map of their land

boundaries produced by a licenced surveyor. Additionally, they must provide specific forms of ownership documents *or* proof of continuous cultivation that disproved each period of alleged disuse by the Custodian. Even complete claims suffer very low rates of success and committee decisions and are in fact merely “recommendations” to commanders.

In addition to changing the legal system, the occupation works on the ground to stop cultivation. A few means include the severe restriction and institutionalized theft of water resources, crop destruction by settlers and soldiers—who have destroyed over 3 million trees, and the release of toxic waste onto farmlands from pesticide factories in the settlements. The occupation’s restrictions on Palestinian movement also target the agricultural sector as a whole; checkpoints and the Apartheid/Separation Wall restrict and cut off land access and agricultural equipment and inputs are heavily restricted. Furthermore, Israeli government-subsidized crops, particularly those that do not meet export standards, are dumped into the West Bank market competing with Palestinian farmers.

To monitor cultivation for land seizure under Article 68, the occupation takes annual photographs of the entire West Bank. Trees are particularly useful to protect against seizure as they are visible from the sky and in the off-season when photographs are often taken and other crops are gone. They can also withstand a season of neglect if farmers are unable to access or tend to their land.

The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN) also puts the occupation and colonisation of Palestine at the root of the conflict in the West Bank. To intervene in this land theft and violence, APN works to support Palestinian land rights through cultivation. Under the Million Tree Campaign, first launched in 2001, APN partners with groups in Palestine to plant trees and crops, particularly on land threatened by Article 68. To date, APN has planted over 2.5 million trees for the benefit of over 29,000 farmers. By partnering with small-scale farmers, the MTC promotes sustainable agriculture practices and livelihoods, while spreading the protective effects of cultivation across the West Bank. APN’s work also promotes food sovereignty as a means to combat food insecurity and reduce dependencies on the occupation.

DISCUSSION RELATING TO THE CASE STUDIES ON PALESTINE

Participants identified many additional aspects of the occupation's land policy. The occupation uses the pretense archeological sites to prevent Palestinian land use; access to arable land behind the Apartheid wall has become more restricted in terms of who can access land and on what dates; and, following the Oslo Accords, the provision of water and education became the responsibility of PA which is unable to fulfill this duty in area C, where the occupation holds full control. One participant mentioned that Palestinians are often unable to access information about the Israeli policies that impact their lives. Another reminded the group that the occupation reaches into Jordan in the form of resource extraction.

Participants worked to identify solutions, widely recognizing the failure of peace negotiations. One pointed to the need to look beyond the root cause of occupation to see the factors sustaining the occupation, namely the failure of imperialist countries to uphold their extraterritorial obligations and the failure of the UN to implement international standards, calling into question the use of relying on these strategies. She also noted that resistance by peoples under colonial domination, apartheid, and foreign occupation is legitimate under international law. This relates to comments made in the introductory session when Ajl argued that that, with regards to Palestine, the framework of national liberation is more salient than that of "rights" in challenging Israel's role in both accumulating Palestinian land and resources and in destabilizing the region for the benefit of its allies.

Another participant named food sovereignty and a return to the land as key priorities. She explained that this framework guarantees the endurance of the land and the people. She named this struggle as the grounds on which to resolve issues related to gender and marginalized communities. In pursuit of this goal, she recommended maintaining ancestral agricultural traditions that preserve the land and also eschew the occupier's control over agrichemicals.

Case study on Morocco: The Sous Region - (*film screening of Nomadic Pastoralists in the Lands of Farmers*)

Rahal Boubrik (Research Professor at the Institute of African Studies – Université Mohammed V)

This film was made for the Arab Research for Social Studies as part of a research project on pastoral resources, pastoral nomadism, and social conflict. Through observational footage and interviews, it examines the issues between local residents and itinerant cattle herders in the Souss Region of southern Morocco.

In the winter, many pastoralists head to Souss, an area that maintains a favourable environment for grazing. The size of this annual migration has led to the degradation of local natural resources such as grasses, agricultural lands, and fruit trees. Pastoralists report that grazing land is limited due to urbanization and climate change, leaving no choice but to encroach on available land. The film shows them trespassing on agricultural lands, where for example, farmers planted argan and cactus fruit trees.

Farmers also mentioned in their interviews that pastoralists were stealing water to quench the thirst of their animals that were consuming and destroying their crops. Dialogue between pastoralists and the affected farmers only led to attacks against farmers. In turn, farmers poisoned their own crops and trees to kill the pastoralists' cattle as well as destroying the pastoralists' tents and belongings. This culminated in violent conflicts between the two parties, where hundreds gathered to defend their interests. Local residents of Souss also rioted against arriving pastoralists.

Though both parties agreed to discuss solutions with government mediation, in 2006, the government reacted to the increase in conflict by issuing a law limiting the movements of pastoral grazing to newly designated reserves. After the law passed, pastoralists were required to receive a licence to move their herds. Interviews showed pastoralists' resentment and ultimate rejection of these constrictions and the difficulties they brought.

Seasonal clashes over land access and natural resource use continue and have begun to take on new political aspects that deepen the conflict.

DISCUSSION RELATING TO THE FILM *NOMADIC PASTORALISTS IN THE LANDS OF FARMERS*

One participant responded to the film, stating that the ancient and once functioning institution of nomadism has been dissolved through laws that benefit investors and are out of touch with migratory people's needs. He argued that law cannot address this issue and that solidarity is the answer.

Another participant noted the film's reliance on the testimony of the pastoralists and said he wished that more farmers and representatives of civil society had spoken. He cautioned that Moroccan pastoralism has become much more commercialised in recent years, with profits from large herds funneled to outside financiers. Boubrik explained that his study goes into more detail on the repercussions of these investments in the agricultural sector.

Case study on Morocco: Guich - (film screening of Landless Moroccans)

Soraya El Kahlaoui (Postdoctoral researcher – Department of the Middle East and North Africa at Ghent University in Belgium)

This short film portrays the consequences of local authorities facilitating investment-backed land grabs. In Douar Ouled Dlim, in Guich, Morocco, the film shows excavators accompanied by police and security forces evicting people to build investments on their homeland. Footage shows the clashes between the community and the police and the lives of Moroccans living in tents adjacent to their destroyed houses, fruit trees, and irrigation systems. This condemnatory film shows that land grabs do not only leave landowners stranded but demolish critical sources of income and people's sense of identity.

After the film, Kahlaoui clarified that the legal framework to protect against land expropriations is still absent and that the government is not working to end the causes of dispossession due to economic interests.

SESSION 4: CASE STUDIES FROM YEMEN, IRAQ, AND TUNISIA

Facilitated by: Tareq Hassan (Chairman of the International Youth Council – Yemen)

Case study on Yemen: Al Jawf Governorate

Amin al-Hakimi (Professor – Department of Agriculture - Sana'a University)

Al-Hakimi described Yemen as witnessing many conflicts in its modern history due to internal and external conflict. Land disputes are and have been very common in Yemen, despite the fact lands are well organised and have clear recognitions of ownership. Land is governed under various legal mechanisms, Sharia law, and customary rights. While judicial systems are in place, tribal and customary structures are the main vehicle for dispute resolution. The current war has exacerbated long-running tribal disputes, which have affected social and communal structures and power balances leading to further land conflicts. Feudal land ownership largely ended at the start of the revolution in the 1960s.

Al-Hakimi provided an overview of the current situation facing Yemen. As with all other major conflicts in Yemen, the current conflict which emerged in 2014-2015 is connected to economics, Yemen's strategic trade location, and the exploitation of resources. Yemen is rich in many resources including oil, which until 2014 covered 70% of the country's budget despite limited production. The conflict has been carried out by Yemenis to fulfill the commercial interests of large investors, multinationals, and neighbouring countries, with many parties taking over wide areas of land. The conflict has endured due to the efforts of Yemenis to resist corporate and foreign control of resources. Such externally fueled conflicts over resources are harder to address than conflicts between Yemenis alone. Attempts to find solutions with the UN have failed as they have been focused on the security aspects and not the economic ones. The war's root cause of resource exploitation has been felt through economic impacts, which constitute a significant proximate factor in the conflict; state institutions are largely un-operational and unable to pay workers, the economy has deteriorated, and there are no prospects for security or manufacturing.

Al-Hakimi described Al Jawf Governorate as a border province with significant tribal leadership that comprises 7.2% of Yemen's land and 2.3% of its population. The area is rich in minerals, water, and fertile land. Oil experts believe there are major oil reserves in the province. However, the area has been marginalized from development efforts, which has limited investment. The area also has a lot of unrealised agricultural potential due to the security situation (now producing just 4.9% of Yemeni agricultural produce). This long-standing marginalization was substantiated by two Saudi-Yemeni boundary treaties in the years 1984 and 2000 that included provisions to ensure the non-utilization of border regions, including Al Jawf.

Al-Hakimi described the conflict over Al Jawf Governorate as taking shape in 2011 and holding continuity with the current war. Shifts in power relations, including under Saudi-backed tribal leaders, have pulled the province in different directions sustaining the instability. Al-Hakimi attributes the lack of investment in al Jawf to the efforts of neighbouring countries to economically isolate the province from the rest of Yemen and suppress education and civic life. Al-Hakimi alleges that those in power seek to sow division between families and tribes and block investment under land is consolidated under their control. He warned that the war is setting the stage for more land conflicts as investments will likely start without Yemeni ownership and involvement.

Al-Hakimi gave several recommendations for resolving this conflict, including a response focused on improving the economic situation, the resolution of tribal and family conflicts, the restoration of the judiciary, the prevention of illicit trafficking and arms sales, the restoration of the constitution that prevents discrimination, and support for all Yemenis in these regions to invest in the land while preventing affiliations to external entities. In the discussion, Al Hakimi explained that the weakness of the state and its institutions have also allowed foreign exploitation and intervention, making weak governance an enabling factor in the land conflict.

DISCUSSION RELATING TO THE CASE STUDY ON YEMEN

Responding to a participant, Al-Hakimi named the end of the siege as the main priority in calls to the UN. One participant drew a connection between the siege on Yemen and Gaza and asked to what extent the siege promoted resilience and unity. Al-Hakimi answered that families are surviving without income by standing with one another. He also said that to emerge from the conflict, Arab countries need to recognise that the demise of one country is the fall of all. Al Hakimi also affirmed one participant's description of the devastation of the Yemeni agricultural sector by bombing campaigns and the systematic targeting of infrastructure. He said that farmers' suffer hindered access to agricultural lands many of which are not secure, particularly in areas with dams. Participants noted the key role civil society should take in initiating mediation and national reconciliation.

One participant pointed to a ten-year study carried out by the World Bank under the last administration, which found that the government focuses its interventions in rural tribal areas to exercise its authority despite significant problems of overlapping land registrations in urban areas. Al Hakimi agreed that the manifestation of land related conflicts depends on the location and perceived value of land, with officials often allowing conflicts to carry out to their benefit. Agricultural lands are now perceived to be of higher value than in the past.

Case study on Iraq: Land, Conflict, and Displacement

Siham Kamel (Chair of the Department of Banking and Financial Sciences – Al Turath University College)

Kamel focused her presentation on the effects of ISIS, Iraqi/Kurdish land disputes, and the protracted IDP crisis in Iraq.

Iraq has been afflicted by conflict for the past four decades. The most recent conflict led to the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2014. ISIS has destroyed critical infrastructure, killed thousands of Iraqis, and created more than six million IDPs. This conflict was the most intense between 2014 and 2017 and has left an enormous humanitarian crisis in its wake. The 7 most affected provinces are: al-Anbar, Babel, Diala, Karkook, Ninewa, Salah el Din and Bagdad. Damages are estimated at around USD45 billion. A lack of security continues to plague development efforts and Iraqi prosperity.

Kamel explained that the geopolitics of Ninewa Province make the resolution of this crisis all the more challenging. The north Iraqi province has difficulty controlling its borders with the Syrian desert and boasts a great deal of ethnic and religious diversity. Turkey has a military base next to Mosul (the largest city in Ninewa), and concerns have been raised that the area may become a conflict zone between

Turkey and Iran. Additionally, this province contains many areas disputed by the Iraqi and Kurdish governments. During the ISIS occupation, many residents moved to Kurdish-held areas, fled south (particularly Turkmen), and left the country altogether (particularly Yazidis and Christians).

The huge wave of displacement generated by ISIS intensified the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. This crisis was met with scarce international funding, while the economic pressures the Iraqi and Kurdistan governments faced from their fight against ISIS threatened their ability to protect human rights and offer assistance. Displaced people continued to live alongside armed conflicts and a weak rule of law. Amid a lack of public services like healthcare and education, proper infrastructure, and employment opportunities, economic conditions continued to deteriorate causing families to restrict their food consumption, borrow money, engage in child labour, and even sell organs.

Kamel outlined many challenges still facing IDPs. In 2018, there were an estimated 2.5 million Iraqi IDPs, currently, an estimated 250-280,000 families remain displaced even in areas that were freed from ISIS years ago. For example, many of the residents of Tarkit, Salah el Din, one of the first areas where the Iraqi government regained control, still live in refugee camps. She listed the challenges faced by returnees as unemployment, a lack of basic services, and economic, tribal, security, and social issues. Halted construction poses a further challenge, stemming from enduring political conflicts, corruption, and an economic meltdown made worse by low oil prices and the pandemic. UXOs also continue to play a destabilizing role. In Mosul, two-thirds of UXO are estimated to lie under rubble, affecting reconstruction and the return of IDPs for years to come.⁴

To close the refugee camps and allow safe return, Prime Minister Mustapha al Kazmi and the Ministry of Immigration and Displacement have put together a plan to evaluate IDPs' intentions and barriers to return and assess the economic and political status in areas of return as well as the availability of services.

Kamel also outlined land disputes between the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces, which go back many years and cover areas under the control of each group. Many of these areas hold a great deal of diversity (Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Muslims, Christians, among other groups) and have seen rising tensions, particularly after Kurdish pressures for a 2017 referendum on separation. These areas fall under the governorates of Karkook in north Baghdad where all areas are disputed; Ninewa, where the towns of Sinjar, Chikhan, Hamdanye, Baachika, Kahtanye, and Talkif are disputed; DIALA in northeastern Baghdad, where the towns of Khankin and Bldrooz are disputed; and Waset, in south Baghdad, where the towns of Badra and Jahsan are disputed. The government of Kurdistan has requested to annex many of these areas, including ones that have significant non-Kurdish populations. ISIS has also played a role in shaping this conflict. For example, Karkook, which is currently under the control of the central government, was taken over by Kurdish forces after ISIS forced the retreat of the Iraqi army.

⁴ According to UN, there are around 8 million tons of bombs under the rubble. Just 30 sq km have been cleared in Mosul, though 80 thousand people returned.

DISCUSSION RELATING TO THE CASE STUDY ON IRAQ

Siham agreed with several participants who named the history of external intervention, and specifically the U.S. occupation of Iraq, as a crucial element in analysing land and conflict. The conversation named recurrent attempts to trigger sectarian divides to allow resource exploitation as a root cause of conflict, including through the divisive effects of the *muhasasa* [sectarian power sharing] system that was written into the constitution during the occupation. The conversation also covered the ways the agricultural sector has been damaged by terrorism and UXOs, from the displacement of farmers, and by the policy of the U.S. occupation that destroyed Iraqi food sovereignty and turned Iraq into a market for foreign goods. In this way, intervention has led to the occupation of oil fields, which continue to be plundered, and agricultural lands.

Case study on Tunisia: Oasis of Jemna

Mohamed Kerrou (Professor of Political Science – University of Tunis El Manar)

Jemna is a remote oasis village located in the southwest of Tunisia with 7500 residents. It is unique in the context of Tunisia. Prior to the French Protectorate in Tunisia, Jemna had been collectively owned by its residents and was under the control of several tribes and religious authorities (as it was a center for religious teachings). In 1922, French colonialists established a date plantation and built export facilities in Jemna that were completely autonomous from the Tunisian state. The operation stayed in colonial hands through Tunisian independence.

In 1964, rural lands were collectivized and colonised tribal lands became the property of the Tunisian state. Nationalizing the land raised questions over the status of state lands (estimated at 700,000 hectares). The state neglected many of these properties and failed to recognise the claims of their original owners or of farmers who now use the lands.

Just before the Tunisian revolution, the people of Jemna felt the Ben Ali regime would fall and organised a sit-in to demand the land back. The government sent in the army, but the sit-in lasted for three months without violence. The village then formed a revolution protection committee with representatives from different political parties to manage the municipality. In 2012, the committee turned into a state-recognised association that sells the dates from Jemna to fund community services (including a daily farmers' market, ambulance, and scholarship fund). Kerrou characterized civil society as emerging from a relationship to the state, and that its role is to be independent but not adversarial. He attributed the success in Jemna to the community's dialogue with the state despite the conflict. He concluded by asserting that Jemna will persist as a symbol of the Tunisian revolution, which lives on in this oasis if not elsewhere.

DISCUSSION RELATING TO THE CASE STUDY ON TUNISIA

One participant asked why this model wasn't expanded to other areas given the numerous parties who called for the redistribution of the state lands formerly held by the French colonists. Kerrou explained that the state retook lands when other communities attempted to do this. He attributed the exceptionality of Jemna to its residents' steadfast attachment to the land and social unity grounded in the historical memory of the destruction of their villages by the state in the 19th century. He also credited Jemna's strategic negotiations with the state and non-hostile approach.

After the presentation, one participant explained that after the French evacuated the land, the state used the colonial forestry codes to take over the lands from their rightful owners. A participant from Morocco compared the situation to that of Morocco where the colonial destruction of collectively held lands caused vast and enduring inequities in land ownership and damaged the productive capacity of the country. Another participant highlighted that in Tunisia, the Renaissance Party introduced a bill to facilitate foreign investment through land sales and the right for investors to repatriate income from investment. If this bill passes it will increase land grabbing and inequity.

SESSION 5: CASE STUDIES FROM LEBANON, LIBYA, AND SUDAN

Facilitated by: Badia Aarab (Board Member – National Federation of the Agricultural Sector in Morocco/Former President of the National Union for Moroccan Engineers

Case study on Lebanon

Khalil Hussein (Professor – International Law - The Lebanese University)

Hussein discussed the impact of Israeli aggression on agricultural lands in South Lebanon in 2006. He explained that agriculture has often been wrongly regarded as a secondary issue in Lebanon, even if it was the main source of livelihood for some rural areas. However, the sector is plagued by many issues that have altered the country's economy, demographic distribution, and social life.

Hussein gave an overview of different stages of Israeli aggression in Lebanon, foregrounding the fact that Lebanon was part of Israel's initial plans for territorial expansion. In 1948, Israel breached UN Resolution 181 and occupied seven agricultural villages on the south Lebanese border in the Litani River area. Lebanon granted the residents of these villages citizenship to assert its sovereignty. In 1964, Israel attacked Arab League-supported restoration activities on the Hasbani-Wezzani River. In 1969 and 1972, Israel waged numerous attacks. In 1978 Israel occupied more land in the south of Lebanon and began attacking agricultural lands directly, affecting the area's livelihood. In 1982, Israel reached Beirut and destroyed agricultural lands in the north and in the Bekaa Valley. Further significant attacks took place in 1993, 1996, and 2006.

Despite this long history of aggression, Hussein clarified that the conflict cannot be limited to a specific timeframe but dates to the idea of establishing Israel on Palestinian land. The timeframe of the occupation is also muddled by Israel's heavy bombardment of Lebanese land in 2006, leaving unexploded ordinances (UXO) that remain as a form of indirect occupation to the present day. These illegal munitions release heavy metals into the soil destroying the agricultural potential of the region,

driving displacement, and showing the lingering effects of warfare on agricultural lands and livelihoods. This problem is made worse by Israel's provision of inaccurate maps of mines and UXO.

Hussein concluded by speaking about the other causes of weak agriculture in Lebanon. He explained that <1% of the national budget is allotted to the Ministry of Agriculture despite attempts to challenge this at parliament. He discussed the capture of agricultural resources like seeds by a small number of monopolies. He also cautioned against overreliance on the expertise of international organizations, including specialized UN agencies, the IMF, and the WTO, which has had harmful effects on the sector. In light of international pressures on agriculture, Hussein recommended local exports assist CSOs in engaging with local authorities to develop land and agriculture policy.

Responding to a question, Hussein affirmed that many people have supported the rift between Lebanese social groups which has caused many conflicts that were not rooted in the land to turn into land conflicts.

Case study on Libya: Abu Isa, Al Zawiyah

Naima Salameh (President of the Cooperative Association for Rural Women in the Western Coast)

Salameh presented two cases related to real estate disputes in Libya and provided insight on solutions from a legal and a societal point of view.

Salameh provided a background on the development of real estate legislation in Libya. She explained that Libyans engaged in land disputes typically attempt social settlements before legal settlements and recourse, even though legislation has been in place since the 1950s. Still, there are many unresolved issues.

Salameh gave the example of the city of Abu Isa. There, three tribes are in conflict over 70 hectares, which one of the tribes has forged ownership documents to. Many bodies have tried to fix the dispute, including the head of the tribe and concerned people, but have been unable to find a solution to satisfy all stakeholders. The conflict has also been prolonged by nepotism, political divisions, and the weakness of state institutions. This reoccurring and unresolved land issue has caused many other problems and led to violence between the tribes.

Salameh also discussed the broader Al Zawiyeh region which relies on grazing and farming and has many land disputes. In the 1970s, the Libyan government instituted agrarian and housing reforms to enhance equality in access to property. The reforms changed property relations profoundly, granting a larger number of families access to residential and agricultural land, but limiting the number of properties a family could possess. The law granted the government the power to expropriate land for public benefit if owners are compensated. Following the revolution in 2011, the original land owners in Al Zawiyeh began retaking their former properties and evicting the new tenants. Though the Libyan legal system provides land conflict resolution mechanisms, the strength of the rule of law has varied due to conflicts, nepotism, and corruption, and the government has not been able to stop violent conflicts from breaking out at the tribal and individual level.

Salameh emphasized the need for community awareness to resolve conflicts socially, legally, and through CSO work before they escalate to the scale seen in Libya. In the Libyan context, she pointed to the need for dispute resolution mechanisms that all parties agree to. She ended her presentation highlighting the need for a proper conflict resolution mechanism framework that's tailored to the regional and national specificities.

Case study on Sudan: Khartoum

Sharaf Eldin Bannaga (Former Minister of Engineering Affairs and of Housing, Construction and Public Utilities/ Expert in Urban Planning/ Professor – Bannaga College in Khartoum)

Bannaga asserted that the main source of political and economic power lies in the lands so that any method to control the land has significant implications on the political and economic balance of power. He explained that most of the many land conflicts in Sudan are protracted due to the country's very large resource-rich spaces. These spaces, coupled with low population density, have been targeted by neighbouring countries, such as Ethiopia, which invaded Sudanese territories. The people of Sudan have become victims of interests in these resources, which have led to internal conflicts as well.

Bannaga explained the legacy of British colonialism in contemporary Sudanese land laws. The continued application of colonial policies has benefited a small group of citizens (as well as historic leaders close to colonialists), but are at the root of today's land issues. One of the aims of British policy was to sow social unrest between groups and to block communication and movement between the north and south of the country. This has led, 50 years later, to the separation of these two areas. The British also implemented multiple types of land ownership, such as "free ownership" land, rental land, agricultural land, pastoral land and land for timbering. These different allocations are still a source of conflict, and therefore a multitude of conflict resolution mechanisms are in place depending on each type of ownership.

Social and political fragmentation was exacerbated by unequal colonial development plans that favored resource-rich areas and neglected others, a pattern continued by current political authorities seeking quick investment on returns in already developed areas. This has also led to the monopolization of political power by citizens of such cities. Furthermore, colonialists provided powerful Sudanese leaders with extremely large landholdings over which to govern. When the British left, the governing committees they established started allocating and controlling lands as they wished. Falsified documents, duplications in land sales, and mismanaged complaints have led to LRC. Pronounced inequalities in investment distribution and landholdings, coupled with political neglect have led to conflict and fights for justice.

Land conflict has also been fostered by governmental neglect of customary rights and assertions that all unregistered land belongs to the state. The government has grabbed and sold such lands to foreign investors and others in positions of power, destabilizing residents' livelihoods and limiting their farming capacities. Subsequent unemployment, poverty, and internal migration have fueled violent conflict over land use and access. Paired with governmental neglect, these conflicts have led to the deterioration of forests and grazing lands, as uncontrolled and unsustainable agricultural practices and timbering expanded, worsening already existing climate change challenges. Against the background of altered land governance structures and pressures on local residents' landholdings, there are also conflicts between settled and itinerant pastoralists, who sometimes cause significant damages to farmlands.

Bannaga also gave a history of land conflict in the capital of Khartoum. The local Al Mahdyya regime governing Sudan (1885-1898) swept Khartoum, left it in ruins, and established a new capital by the Nile river: Omdurman. When the British colonists took power (1898-1956) they violently overtook this capital, killing many Sudanese. They rebuilt Khartoum as the new capital, giving it a European character and forbidding Sudanese people from inhabiting and living in their own city.

Today, Khartoum faces immense land management difficulties. The city hosts a large number of refugees and cannot supply essential services or housing at a pace with residents' needs. Planning is incoherent and there is a lack of community participation that weakens political leadership. To combat random human settlements, the government has provided land for families to build on. Land allotments are unequal in terms of size and location and based on social caste. Additionally, there are many building violations, including the seizure of streets and encroachments on others' properties. Violations are also carried out by state institutions and are a main cause of urban unrest.

Bannaga concluded by summarizing the main root causes behind LRC in Sudan: the continuation of colonial policies and the government's inability or disinterest in reform, the unjust allocation and control of land and its resources by the powerful, the disregard for customary rights, and the lack of proper urban planning. Bannaga also named the commodification of land as a root cause, stating that local governments who act out of the belief that land is a commodity go against religious and customary provisions for social partnerships and the equal division of natural resources. He noted that society has become used to these policies and is less supportive of initiatives to restore or reform the land.

Bannaga's main recommendation was the reformation of policy and legislation and to mend the relationship between society and the state, especially in Khartoum, where he also noted the importance of pairing urban planning with environmental and social goals. Bannaga stated that justice with relevance to land access is necessary for sustainable peace and recommended controlling land prices to enhance equality in land access, investment, and production. To aid the capacity of the state to protect and monitor land rights and ecological impacts, Bannaga recommended expanding the use of geospatial technologies and GIS Mapping.

During the discussion that followed Bannaga's presentation, a participant from Sudan noted that the conflict in Darfur originated between farmers and pastoralists, but it has been exploited by foreign countries to become portrayed as tribal or ethnic in nature.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The discussion held throughout and following the initial sessions of the programme formed a crucial component of the EGM. The discussion between participants helped synthesize the material presented in the case studies, identify common themes, and discover areas of contention and omission. A wide range of expertise informed this session, facilitating the analytical work necessary for the development of the land and conflict typology, one of the main elements of the Study Report on Land and Conflict in the Arab region.

WRAP-UP DISCUSSION

Facilitated by: Mariam Al Jaajaa (General Manager–The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature)

Al Jaajaa opened the floor for additional solutions. She urged participants to identify overarching goals in light of the days' conversations, such as fighting poverty, achieving food sovereignty and sustainable development, guaranteeing individual and communal land rights, and resolving conflicts sustainably. Once a vision is formed, she explained local-level challenges can be assessed and relevant capacities strengthened to implement appropriate decisions and policies. She asked for ideas on the long and short-term roles of different stakeholders and spoke about the need for accountability frameworks, including at the regional level and through the upholding of extraterritorial obligations.

The following themes emerged as participants reflected on the case studies and on each other's ideas:

Joining the Symbolic and Material Characteristics of Land

The affective characteristics of land were mentioned throughout the conference. Land was described as not just a space for production and extraction, but essential to "identity, heritage, and history". Land was also characterized as a site on which to maintain a "homeland" and establish freedom. Many noted that such elements are not secondary considerations but must be connected to economic, technical, political, and other dimensions of land. Some participants explained that in their countries, land is seen as something to maintain at any cost. Participants also underscored that struggles against the exploitation of the land and people are not unique to the Arab region but are fundamental to the concerns of people throughout history and across the world.

The control over land was named as the dominant feature of multiple types of exploitation, including colonialism and capitalist appropriation of goods and resources. The commonalities participants noted in the cases presented, particularly in the numerous mentions of colonialism, urbanization, and weak governance can be partially explained by this long-running thread of economic and ecological exploitation. The foundational role land plays in forming identities, freedoms, and livelihoods, paired with its role as the primary site for disenfranchisement and exploitation, may explain comments about land underlying most conflicts even when land-related aspects are not immediately visible.

Advancing National Sovereignty

Several participants placed national sovereignty at the root of their struggle and urged parties to name the problem of imperialism directly. Participants called for the formation of greater national and regional unity to fight imperialism and dismantle any causes that have allowed or continue to allow it into the region.

The relationships between war, imperialism, and capitalist exploitation were described under the framework of "accumulation by dispossession." One example given was the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq's practice of importing foreign seeds and enforcing a US agribusiness monopoly during the US invasion and occupation. Many participants noted that imperialism and the actions of multinational corporations extend outside of the context of war, including through economic restructuring under the IMF. One person described foreign investors as often seizing the most profitable land and waters while driving ecological and climate issues, with all their broad repercussions.

While diagnosing land conflict, at times participants debated whether poor governance or colonialism and imperialism primarily drive conflict and land conflict. However, many people pointed to connections between these issues. Some pointed to the lack of international governance and enforceable extraterritorial obligations as facilitating neocolonial encroachment on land and agriculture. Others

noted the specific colonial destruction of effective land administration measures, including recognition of communal landholdings and dispute resolution mechanisms that had allowed more just resource distribution. The general replacement of customary and religious law with European modes of law was also named as a driving factor of conflict as upending centuries of norms and rules and challenged previously peaceful relationships between groups. Following independence, many governments maintained colonial land governance systems, allowing the powerful to exploit the land at the expense of others, although the land redistribution efforts of some governments in the 70s-90s were noted.

Suggestions to counter exploitation included reforming laws carrying colonial-era legislation into the present day and setting up accountability mechanisms for public and private actors. Multiple people raised the need for independent assessments of national priorities, undertaken inclusively with substantial input from a wide cross-section of the countries' populations.

Designing Just and Comprehensive Land Governance

The importance of land governance, in terms of its potential to cause or resolve conflict and as a useful conceptual framework, was discussed. Some participants focused on the need for laws to prevent resource monopolization at the expense of those who use the land for their livelihoods, an issue that can lead to large-scale conflict. Others noted the importance of strong governance to promote and protect the rights of different social groups, including religious and ethnic minorities, women, and the poor. The failure of international governance to prevent foreign exploitation of the region was also addressed.

Others noted low awareness, participation, and adherence to international binding and non-binding commitments and frameworks by governments in the region and named this as a primary issue to address. The monitoring and reporting of the national implementations of agreements also remain priorities. One participant highlighted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land Fisheries and Forests as holding particular regional importance. The non-binding nature of many agreements was noted as an obstacle, as was the lack of well-implemented environmental policies at the national, regional, and global levels.

One participant highlighted the necessity of integrating land issues into the triple nexus approach (Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus) promoted by UN agencies when responding to situations of crisis and conflict. The Framework for Action for Food Security in Protracted Crises, developed by the Committee on World Food Security, was given as an example of a tool that uses conflict-affected communities' access to land and productive resources as a key principle for humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding processes.

Participants noted that despite the existence of some reforms and conflict resolution tools, governmental opacity, nepotism, and disregard for public opinion and participation continue to allow land grabs and violations by internal and external entities. Proper governance at the local and regional levels was mentioned as key to supplementing areas where central governments fall short and tailoring policies to specific contexts. Participants named the need for strong monitoring efforts and accountability mechanisms focused on all levels of governance.

The integration of land policy with other sectors was also addressed, including as a means to prevent LRC. One participant stated that his country's government provides agricultural inputs to farmers who can present land registration documents— a discriminatory and incomplete policy given the prevalence of

unregistered land. This policy may discourage agricultural production or push to dismantle customary land rights. A more pragmatic and contextually specific approach that considers the capacities and limitations of all relevant sectors in developing land policy can be found in the Fit-For-Purpose (FFP) approach to land administration advocated by UN-Habitat.

Building Independent National Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Speakers and participants underscored the incapacity of many states to prevent, solve, and mitigate land-related conflicts. Participants called for effective and impartial decision processes and action plans to tackle all stages of the conflict cycle, noting that many existing platforms are deeply affected by imbalanced power relations. They expressed the need for strong formal and informal conflict resolution platforms and tools, paired with a fair judiciary, that can address peoples' dispossession by national or international actors, support resource redistribution, and advance durable peace. One speaker argued that primacy should be given to the development of these mechanisms as providing land to the landless and making changes to support sustainable land use will invariably bring disputes. Another mentioned that conflict resolution also is key to strengthening the resilience of communities and countries against harmful outside interventions.

Remediating the Effects of War on the Natural and Built Environment

Contributors to the event were quick to remind the gathering that land issues do not only drive conflict but that conflict is felt on the land itself. Unexploded ordnance was cited as a means for conflicts to extend well past the end of open hostilities and as a major impediment to proper and safe land access and agricultural use. The natural environment was also identified as a specific arena for conflict, as seen in the Israeli use of crop destruction to annex Palestinian lands. Participants called for concerted efforts to demine conflict-affected areas and to prevent belligerent land destruction through enforcing international law and supporting impacted farmers. The discussion also encompassed the effects of warfare on urban environments, including the devastation of the Syrian civil war on municipal infrastructure and the effects of the many mines left by ISIS in Mosul.

The ability of these ecological effects to perpetuate conflict was also analyzed in the specific case of IDP and refugee displacement. Participants linked the destruction of productive resources, both natural and infrastructural, to impeded and unsuccessful return. They identified proper land rehabilitation, sufficient institutional capacity, access to housing and livelihood opportunities, and community dialogue as requirements for successful return, and named the need to bolster all of these elements in conflict-affected areas where residents have suffered displacement. Participants also discussed how displacement can disrupt local tenure arrangements in refugees' communities of origin and trigger issues over land and resource use in host communities, all of which require robust and proactive conflict resolution mechanisms.

Participants mentioned that conflict and war create acute environmental risks impacting ecosystems, livelihoods, and human health, presenting a clear need for stronger frameworks to enable the monitoring of and accountability for the environmental impacts of war.

Expanding Recognition of Land Tenure Types

Many people placed the destruction of communal lands and the commodification of land as a root cause of land conflict, in many cases dating back to European colonial rule. One participant gave the example

of Morocco to explain the enduring issues left by the destruction of collective tenure. After entering Morocco in 1912, the French created a bifurcated agricultural system through expropriation of individually and communally held land in fertile and resource-rich areas. They created large scale holdings that allowed capital accumulation for the colonists and a new class of rural elite who largely collaborated with them. This has caused marginalization and impoverishment of most Moroccan regions. The dismantling of the communal tenure system continued after the colonists left, extending beyond fertile areas where many local tribes reside, and largely for the benefit of foreign investors.

Participants linked the destruction of collective tenure to a governance shift from protecting use rights to protecting ownership rights. A legal emphasis on ownership rights was widely criticized as an impediment to land equity and productive land use. However, some participants cautioned that customary power structures are unable to protect tenure rights in light of economic and political changes, leaving a need for structures that can formally register communal land rights.

One participant recognised that in many of the case studies, occupation, conflict, and unregistered land rights have led to ambiguities in tenure rights. Instead of promoting comprehensive registration, she argued that the vast amounts of unregistered land and the length of registration processes should motivate the recognition of a variety of forms of land rights (indigenous, customary, informal) as legitimate.

The issue of communal land ownership was tied to food sovereignty. One participant explained that land conflicts are typically based on the monopolization of resources and illegitimate enrichment at the expense of those who use the land for livelihoods. Several participants cited the need for broad land and agrarian reforms developed through close coordination with local communities to rectify current land distribution imbalances that fuel conflict. Institutionalizing food sovereignty could include developing communal land structures that prioritize the rights of those actively using the land.

Promoting Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

Through the conference, participants called for food sovereignty and peoples' ability to access sources of production to control their food systems. Multiple participants noted the complementary relationship between food insecurity and conflict as well as the efforts of foreign forces to keep the region from planting its own food. Many people attributed regional food dependencies as originating with the colonial destruction of collective production and furthered by the current push of foreign goods into regional food systems. Promoting food security without food sovereignty was described as a way to expand the dominance of transnational corporate agriculture. The role of international financial institutions in weakening local agricultural markets and promoting urbanization was also mentioned. One person described the financial crisis of 2008 as setting off accelerated land grabbing, the commodification of agriculture, and subsequent food insecurity.

One participant criticized the agricultural techniques promoted by many donor agencies. She pointed to contemporary techniques like hydro- and aquaponic cultivation as disrupting agricultural traditions that bind people to the land. She argued that such techniques disrupt the bond of the people and their land causing the destruction of local agriculture. She also said that technical solutions to challenges such as water scarcity are important but not sufficient to address root causes, such as, in the case of Jordan, the theft and contamination of water. Many technological advances were also positioned as a way for profits to be restricted to a small number of large landowners who rely on others' wage labour, and who are often oriented towards exporting their crops and are uncommitted to local crop varieties. Participants

also noted the way so-called technological advances open the door for the products of international agribusinesses, perhaps most dangerously in the case of patented, foreign-owned seeds.

Participants recommended the prohibition of genetically modified seeds, the inclusion of food sovereignty into national constitutions, and the prioritization of food production in land distribution.

Advancing Women's Rights

Many participants noted the fundamental role women play in issues related to land, including peacekeeping and the agricultural sector. Many also noted the need for women to have equal access to land as owners, tenure rights holders, and workers. One mentioned that it is important to ensure women's independent food security. Both social and legal obstacles were identified.

Extending the Impact of Civil Society

The effectiveness of CSO responses to crises was characterized differently in different contexts. In the Lebanese context, CSOs were described as filling in for ineffectual political parties and as able to build social cohesion despite deep and externally-driven rifts in Lebanese society.

Multiple participants affirmed the need to financially and technically support CSOs promoting land use and access, who form a bulwark against the protraction and worst effects of LRC. Particularly useful roles for CSOs were defined as conducting training and needs assessments, hosting mediations and dialogue with community members who are often not included in institutional responses, and raising awareness on the issues underlying local conflicts. Participants named training CSOs in mediation techniques as a priority. The work of CSOs engaged in direct actions with more immediate effects, like providing assistance to small-scale farmers and demining land, was also highlighted. Building coalitions between CSOs, rather than competing for external funding, was noted as crucial to determining shared priorities and carrying out comprehensive projects.

Enhancing Regional Cooperation and Integration

The need for concerted regional efforts in the realm of land and conflict was highlighted throughout the event, likely due in part to the commonalities between the challenges faced in the various countries participants hailed from, and because many conflicts in the region reverberate beyond the confines of national borders. Participants encouraged coordination between governments and the sharing of successful models to facilitate safe and sustainable refugee policy, aid the identification and implementation of ecologically and socially suitable solutions to land issues, and adapt global land-related frameworks to the regional context. Participants described regional unity as a protection mechanism against internationalized conflicts, urging Arab states currently engaged in conflicts to settle their disputes in a just manner and noting that divisions between countries leave room for foreign intervention and conflict exacerbation by outside forces.

Maintaining Ongoing, Independent Analysis

Many participants noted the importance of the kind of discussion that took place at the conference. The strengths of detailed country-level analysis and of regional platforms for the identification of commonalities were broadly recognised. The need for communal and regional ownership of analysis was also repeated. One participant noted the prevalence of foreign organizations working in conflicts that exacerbate social divisions and violence, urging that the diagnosis of land problems involve all affected

people. At the regional level, this includes identifying internal and external factors that trigger regional level conflict.

Several participants mentioned the need for deep technical study, as political solutions depend upon ground-level technical knowledge and implementation. Such knowledge is also important to transmit to activists who are often defeated in the face of overwhelming technical complexity and by parties who seek to keep land issues off the negotiating table. This points to one participant's call for experts and academics to provide evidence and reports in solidarity with those working to resolve the root causes of land conflicts. To advance the state of research, participants called for clear typologies of regional tenure types and regulations and more transparent land data with which to address corruption, inequality, and foreign investment.

Ideas for Action Following the Conference

Participants made recommendations for building on the momentum of the conference. One participant argued that a lack of shared Arabic terminology to discuss land issues weakens the development of collective understanding and ultimately the ability to preserve land rights. He called for a second meeting to develop a shared vocabulary. Another participant urged the group to develop a statement presenting the examples and goals shared at the conference and to begin a lobbying process at the country, regional and international levels to speak about these conflicts. While she noted the importance of active civil society engagement with the government, she also clarified that civil society is in an advantageous position as it is not beholden to the same forces as states, and must carry out the actions it sees fit.

CLOSING REMARKS

Mariam Al Jaajaa (General Manager – Arab Group for the Protection of Nature)

Al Jaajaa concluded the event by thanking the speakers, interpreters, participants, and organising partners for their preparations and contributions to the EGM. She invited everyone interested in food sovereignty to work alongside APN in realizing many of the goals named in the conference.

Meeting Assessment

The event was successful in three main regards: building a network of expertise, preparing for the Study Report on Land and Conflict in the Arab region, and providing a template for future events.

The event brought together experts, academics, and community organizers to share and discuss information on and experiences with land-related conflicts in the Arab region in a systematic and forthright manner. It was unique in prioritizing local expertise and practitioners, particularly from conflict-affected communities with first-hand knowledge. This group is a valuable resource going forward, in which trust has already been established through the breaking of misconceptions and untangling of challenging topics.

The event facilitated the development of case studies, themes, typologies, and recommendations for the Study Report on Land and Conflict in the Arab region as it was designed in harmony with the outline and content of the report.

The event provides a template for other international events that seek to benefit from the expertise of a wide cross-section of professional and geographic sectors. It showed the potential of online events to reach those who may not be able to travel to an International conference without sacrificing a natural dialogue. Carrying the majority of the discussion in Arabic, while providing English interpretation allowed meaningful and lively participation of regional experts, who could express, understand and debate each other easily.

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