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By Romy Santpoort, Marthe Derkzen and Gemma Betsema

On April 12, 2018, LANDac organised a meeting for Dutch actors working on land governance to reflect on the World Bank's Land and Poverty Conference 2018, that took place in Washington D.C. from March 19 – 23. The meeting brought together individuals who attended the WB Conference in Washington and those who did not attend but do have an interest in what was discussed. The reflection meeting was an opportunity to share impressions and experiences and reflect on the role and agenda of the Dutch community working on land governance. This report shares some of the main experiences, reflections and discussions that were brought to the table.

LANDac coordinator Marthe Derkzen kicked off the meeting by welcoming everyone on behalf of LANDac. Frits van der Wal (MoFA) continued by putting the Land and Poverty Conference in historical perspective, stressing the significant increase in attendance – and thus importance. The large number of participants, i.e. 1800, was experienced as

chaos but one that offers a huge network. Content wise, Frits van der Wal highlighted that data was a central theme this year: One of the tasks laying ahead is convincing 75 countries to start measuring the SDG indicators, and build strong empirical evidence on why improved land tenure security is important.

“The first time, we were there with 250 people. Now, we were there with 1800 people. It is (...) a reflection on the importance of the topic, also within the Bank. – Frits van der Wal, MoFA

Fit-for-purpose and Blockchain

Those who attended land registration related sessions at the WB Conference noticed an increased recognition of fit-for-purpose land administration, contrary to last year when fit-for-purpose still raised some doubt. Another interesting impression considered perception of land tenure security, more specifically the controversy between having insecure formal rights and informal but secure rights. This issue also came up in the [LANDac Masterclass](#).

A popular theme this year was blockchain: the technology of a digital and growing list of encrypted information blocks (about, for example, land registration or transactions) that are linked to each other. In combination with smart contracts and better data access, blockchain may offer a promising solution and future platform for land administration. The reflection meeting also identified challenges: the technology demands much electricity, can be hacked or is considered a panacea. At the WB Conference, legal challenges were raised and in Utrecht people added that the infrastructure necessary for implementation is lacking in many African countries.

“Implementing [blockchain] is a different story and studies have ignored aspects of this. I got the same impression from government officials from Ghana at the conference who said: Fine, but how will we implement it? – Kwabena Asiamah, ITC Twente

Power and politics

Land and gender, another focus point of the WB Conference, brought the reflection group into a debate on the power and politics that are at play in Washington. The Conference included a women’s caucus and several panels dedicated to the importance of women’s land rights. Participants of the reflection meeting missed a critical look at these panels in which everyone seemed to agree with each other. Michelle McLinden-Nuijen (LANDac): “There was a disconnect of people singing to their own choir. Power issues were lacking in the discussion (...) We are collecting data, but who is it for? Data is political.” The question was raised: Was there deliberate depoliticisation at the conference? An NGO representative responded: “Coming from an NGO, you could feel alone. (...) Many organisations go there to hunt for funding, always presenting positive outcomes. If you go to the conference to acquire funds, I understand that it is difficult to be reflective or admit that you don’t know how something works.” Participants also reflected that there were quite a few topics related to post-conflict areas on the WB Conference agenda, however, difficulties in those contexts rarely got mentioned. There was hardly any attention for displacement issues in post-conflict settings.

Feedback to the World Bank

The reflection meeting generated a discussion about the competition between actors at the World Bank, the focus on networking, and politics that, at times, overrule content. Because of the Conference size and the many parallel sessions, discussion and reflection may get lost. One idea, or suggestion, is to allow and encourage more variation in work forms in order to stimulate cross-fertilisation.

The Conference masterclasses that took place on Friday the 23rd of March were experienced as very positive, because they allowed for in-depth discussions and cross-fertilisation between people and organisations. However, their programming on Friday – as an annex to the Conference – was perceived as a missed opportunity. About the role of academics at the conference a participant from one of the Dutch universities reflected: “Now, it was to showcase what we have done, but we should take some responsibility here (...) Our role is to provoke, to ask questions.”

Closing

After two hours of lively discussions, the meeting concluded with the idea of providing feedback to the World Bank as a group, with the intention to have more impact on reaching the SDGs. Also posed was the idea of organising a session on Blockchain by and for the Netherlands land community. In addition, Marthe Derkzen noted, the reflections are useful to consider for the LANDac Conference, happening June 28 – 29 in Utrecht.



Thanks to all those participating in the World Bank Conference Reflection Meeting 2018: ACTIAM, ActionAid Netherlands, Deltares, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, eLEAF, IHS Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, ITC Twente, Kadaster International, Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO), Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), Oxfam Novib, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Wageningen University & Research, ZOA International.

This is a report by LANDac – the Netherlands Land Academy for equitable and sustainable development. For more information on the masterclass or our work, please contact LANDac’s coordinator Marthe Derkzen: m.l.derkzen@uu.nl or visit our website: www.landgovernance.org
