

Call for applications: field research

Ten years after: A "reality check" on impact assessments of infrastructural projects



**Photo of the Bujagali dam in Uganda taken by Ezra Litjens in November 2018*

LANDac is looking for 3 or 4 researchers based in the Global South. The focus of the research is on the impact of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of an infrastructural project which has been built about ten years ago. We are zooming in on the gap between projected and real impacts of ESIA's. The aim is to improve the positive contribution of ESIA's to responsible investments in infrastructural projects, in particular where these involve displacement. Therefore, we are looking for people with experience in qualitative research methods and knowledge of land governance issues and ESIA's. We offer a maximum budget of €5.000,- to cover the costs of field research, and we provide support throughout the process from the Netherlands.

Project summary

Infrastructural projects in the Global South often have adverse impacts on the environment and local communities. Environmental and Social Impact Assessments play an important role in making sure these investments happen responsibly but there is considerable debate about the degree to which they achieve this purpose in practice. One of the knowledge gaps is around the long-term experiences of such impacts: How well does this instrument predict long term impacts? And what does this mean for the appropriateness of the proposed mitigation and compensation measures? These questions become especially critical when displacement and resettlement is involved, for the serious impact that it may have on lives and livelihoods. What makes them difficult to answer is that many of the changes caused by infrastructural interventions might only become apparent over a longer time span, and it also takes some time before it becomes clear

whether compensation has been sufficient and promises such as durable job opportunities have been kept

The impact of displacement of infrastructural projects are one of LANDac's core issues. With this research we are zooming in on the gap between projected and real impacts in order to contribute to the improvement of the practice of impact assessment in the Global South. The aim is to improve the positive contribution of social and environmental impact assessments to responsible investments in infrastructural projects, in particular where these involve displacement. Following up on an earlier desk study, we are now launching this possibility for 3 or 4 field-based case studies (see Annex 1. for more information about the research project).

We are looking for (junior) researchers from and based in the Global South to study the impact of the ESIA of an infrastructural project which has been built about ten years ago. As a researcher, you select a case study, conduct data gathering, analyse your findings, formulate empirically based conclusions, and write a case study research report. Field research is supposed to take place between March – April 2022 and LANDac offers a research budget to cover the field research costs and support throughout the process from the Netherlands. The deadline for application is 9 February 2022.

Call for field research

LANDac offers an opportunity for short research engagements for 3 or 4 researchers located in the Global South. Each researcher will propose and conduct a case study on an infrastructural project, involving displacement, realised several years ago, and where a serious impact assessment has been done. Enough years should have passed to be able to see how the project has affected people over the somewhat longer term and compare this to the projections made in the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment. Prior knowledge about the case and familiarity with some of the key stakeholders are a pre. This field work opportunity might be most interesting for researchers who can integrate the field research with ongoing work or (research) project(s). The assignment is also open to people who have been involved in the impact assessment and are now interested to look at it with an open mind. The research involves primary data collection between March-April 2022.

Each case study should answer the following questions:

- *Real-life impacts*: How have the lives and livelihoods of people affected by the project been impacted? What adjustments have they made as they were displaced? How do people appreciate compensation measures to mitigate/neutralise these losses?
- *Gap between real and projected impacts*: How do these *experienced impacts* compare to the *projected impacts* as presented in the impact assessments made for the case? Where does the gap between projected and registered impacts become especially problematic?
- *What lessons can be drawn* concerning:
 - What went wrong – and what went right- with the projection of impacts?
 - What can and cannot be expected of impact assessments?

The assignment includes case selection, data collection and analysis, and writing:

- Selecting a specific case study and establishing access to the field. You preferably have contacts in the field and access to the ESIA report of your case study or have contacts that could give you access.
- Data collection through desk study, expert interviews, and field work, including (not exhaustive):
 - Studying the ESIA of an infrastructural project and other relevant documents.
 - Expert interviews on the expectations of impact and developments in reality to date.
 - Experiences of locally affected or displaced communities; their expectations of the project and the experienced impact on the long term.
 - Experiences of professionals involved in the impact assessment process and their current reflections.
 - The role of the government, investors, and other actors in the ESIA and implementation of mitigation and compensation measures.
- Data analysis in line with the overall questions formulated for the research,
- Write a research report based on shared guidelines.
- Including formulating recommendations to improve the practice of impact assessment in relation to predicting the impact on displaced communities
- There is a possibility to publish (first author) or contribute (co-author) publications related to the research project.

We expect you to

- Be fluent in English and the language of your proposed field site.
- Have knowledge of and/or experience in working with land governance issues and local communities, and knowledge about ESIA's.
- Have previous experience with qualitative data collection methods.
- Have the ability to work independently, travel to field site(s) and make sufficient time available between March-April 2022 to collect the necessary data in the field and preparation before and report writing after the data collection (see planning below).

What we offer

- LANDac will cover the costs of field research, with a maximum budget of €5.000,- per case study (including VAT).
- Support from the Netherlands, both from the LANDac office as well as by a small working group of Netherlands-based experts from universities and non-governmental organizations.
- The opportunity to become part of an international network of professionals from different sectors.
- Free participation in the LANDac Annual International Conference 2022 and the Annual Summer School 2022 (excluding travel and housing costs in case these take place on location in Utrecht).

Express your interest

To express your interest, please share your CV, a cover letter (1 page) and a draft work plan (1 page), in which you detail:

- Your current work and country of residence.
- The case you propose to study & why this would be a suitable case.
- Your familiarity with the case and expected access to documents, resource persons, and the field site.
- Your affinity or experience with impact assessments and/or land governance issues.
- Your experience with qualitative data collection methods.
- If relevant: how this research builds on, contributes to or matches ongoing work or projects.
- Include a reference about previous work or experience on the topic (name of a person we might approach).
- Draft work plan: a concise idea for the research of a specific case study, including the methodologies and possible interviewees, a draft planning and a preliminary budget. (If you are selected, we will ask for a more detailed workplan)

Please send your CV, cover letter (including a reference), and draft work plan to landac.geo@uu.nl by 9 February.

Planning

9 February 2022	Deadline to express your interest
16 February 2022	Selection of professionals and case studies
March-April 2022	Data collection in selected field sites
22 May 2022	Draft of the research report
5 June 2022	Final version of the report

About LANDac

LANDac – The Netherlands Land Academy – is a partnership between Dutch organisations and their Southern partners working on land governance for equitable and sustainable development. In order to understand and address new and existing types of land-related conflicts, LANDac brings together stakeholders who might not otherwise meet – particularly academic researchers, private sector and civil society representatives, and policy makers in the field of land governance and development. Since 2010, LANDac brings together stakeholders, conducts research and acts as a knowledge hub in line with these land governance related topics. See our website for more information: <https://www.landgovernance.org/>

Annex 1.

About the research project

Infrastructural projects are often aimed at development, which should benefit the country and its population. However, adverse impact on the environment and the people often hampers the success of these projects. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment are a key component for responsible investments, as they make ex ante predictions of the expected impacts on the environment as well as on people's livelihoods. They inform, or should inform, decisions about whether or not to pursue specific interventions, what measures might improve the project design and implementation, and what compensation measures to the displacement affected population would be needed. However, even in best case scenarios, where there is a commitment on the side of government and investors to take impact assessment and compensation seriously, there are questions about the extent to which the ex-ante predictions are accurate and measures proposed sufficient. Key concerns relate to the distribution of costs and benefits of the proposed infrastructure among different social groups. A particularly challenging topic concerns displacement and compensation for loss of livelihood options. What impact did loss of assets and displacement have on people's lives and livelihoods? Were measures to help people make a fresh start effective? To what extent did the impact assessment make proper predictions? Are there other aspects of loss that became apparent on the long term, which were not considered in the impact assessment and compensation? And what should be the implications if impact assessments missed the mark?

To the background of current concerns about the reduced development impact of infrastructural projects and the dispossessions suffered by populations affected by them – core issues in land governance and in the LANDac agenda in particular- this project zooms in **on the gap between projected and real impacts in order to improve the practice of impact assessment**. Many of the changes caused by infrastructural interventions might only become apparent over a somewhat longer timespan; whether compensation has been sufficient and, after construction, what more durable job opportunities exist and for whom. Also, people's choices about where to live and how to re-organize their lives after displacement, need some time to flesh out. This is our reason to study cases 'ten years after'.

One of the reasons for the gap between projected and real impacts is the complexity of life choices involved and the differentiated ways in which compensation measures impact people's options and challenges. Impact assessments might improve if these complexities are better anticipated. Additional problems arise around the implementation of compensation measures, which may be badly managed and fail to meet the initial promises. This raises the question to what extent the impact assessment *should* – and feasibly *can*- consider potential caveats around implementation of compensation and anticipate ways to address this.

The project addresses the following questions:

- *Reality check*: What people have gained and lost due to the infrastructural project in terms of their livelihoods and quality of life and what have mitigation and compensation packages meant to mitigate/neutralise these losses? How do people appreciate

compensation measures in view of the life readjustments they have had to make as they were displaced?

- *Gap between real and projected impacts*: How do these lived experiences of gains and losses compare to the projected impacts as presented in the impact assessments made for the case?
- *What lessons can be drawn* concerning:
 - the accuracy of ex-ante impact assessments and where the gap between projected and registered impacts becomes especially problematic
 - what can and cannot be expected of impact assessments.