



Network of Excellence
on Land Governance in Africa

NELGA Good Practices

Embracing Digital Transformation – Virtual Development of NELGA

The **Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA)** is a partnership of leading African universities and research institutions with proven leadership in education, training and research on land governance. Currently NELGA has more than **70 partner institutions** in over 40 countries and is organized in 6 regional and 1 technical nodes supported by a Secretariat.

Introduction

By its continental nature, digitization always held a major place in the functioning of the NELGA network. The Covid-19 pandemic further strengthened this trend by fostering the use of digital communication tools to ensure the continuity of activities. Actively joining the mega-trend of digitalization, NELGA has put in place a wide range of activities and structures targeting students, researchers and other relevant land stakeholders. For instance, several NELGA partner universities have set up digital teaching / learning environments to meet their students' educational needs. These platforms enable better access to learning tools, strongly support the learning experiences and pedagogical guidance, and are often better adapted to promote a balanced student life-style. Secondly, the development of online training modules offers participants the possibility of bridging training gaps and accessing learning materials to strengthen their knowledge in the area of land governance. Finally, the network set up numerous online events, such as workshops and training. These forms of online cooperation foster knowledge exchange, networking and brainstorming among stakeholders and partners of NELGA, to actively contribute to the dynamic of exchange and engagement on land administration and reforms across the continent.



Implementation



1. Learning platforms



Learning platforms provide an enlightening example of how some NELGA partner universities seize the opportunities given by digital transformation in the education sector. By developing flexible and innovative pedagogical interfaces, they foster a comprehensive learning experience adapted to both students' and teachers' needs.

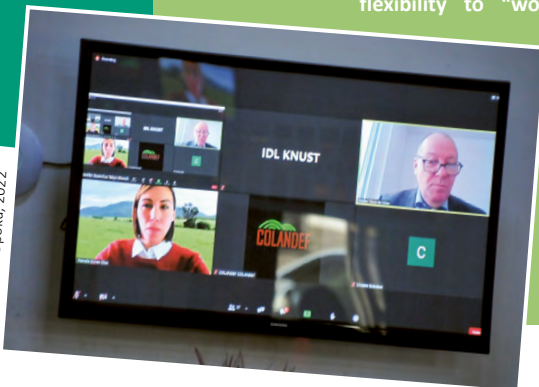
KNUST – V-Classroom

NELGA's Anglophone West Africa Node, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), introduced a learning platform named *V-classroom* in March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak in Ghana. The V-classroom enables students and teachers to present course materials, engage and interact with one another and work together in groups.

The platform responds to the students' and lecturers' needs by offering them a flexible option for long distance learning, collaboration and communication. It is based on a blended e-learning approach, including both synchronous learning and asynchronous recordings accessible from anywhere. Those different options allow students to personalize their learning experience and to study on their own terms. It also offers great flexibility to “working-students” for an adequate

balance between work and education. To set up the platform, KNUST organized several training workshops to build the capacities of all lecturers in using the virtual classroom. Even though the virtual classroom was set up in the Covid-19 pandemic context, it has come to stay.

© GIZ, Patrick Opoiku, 2022



The V-classroom is only an example among other. For instance, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the “Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II”, node for the NELGA network in Northern Africa, was already testing a learning platform for the students of the “Geospatial sciences and land governance” Master. The platform proved to be very useful in mitigating the absence of “on-site” class.

II. Online training modules

NELGA partners are developing training modules in digital formats as part of the network efforts in mainstreaming knowledge and skills development measures in the field of land governance to a larger public. Indeed, available online to a wide audience, they reinforce free and open access to asynchronous learning materials (available outside the constraints of time and place) surrounding the land topic.



© Desola Lanre-Ologun on Unsplash, 2018

GLTN – online modules

NELGA and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) collaborated to set up learning modules on innovative concepts, tools and practices in land governance. Four jointly developed modules are available to interested students, academics, teachers, land practitioners (e.g. civil servants) and trainers. They cover the topics of fit-for-purpose land administration, improving transparency and addressing gender-based land disparities.

The courses are accessible since March 2020 to anyone, at any time and from any device enabling a personalized learning experience. The course material is made of simple but captivating visuals combined with audio narration. Moreover, theoretical resources are completed with dynamic learning instruments such as discussion forums, interview videos of land experts and other additional resources (e.g. case studies, topic focus, official texts, etc.). More than academic training, these modules offer familiarization with practical tools that can readily be implemented in the field.

To access the modules, readers are invited to visit [GLTN website](#).

MOOC on Land and Conflict

NELGA, the University of Yaoundé I, the University Agency of Francophonie (AUF) and the GIZ have formed a partnership to develop and implement a MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) about Land and Conflicts. This online course targets both professionals, involved in the prevention and settlement of land disputes, and students, likely to work in conflict related fields. In addition, the MOOC adopts an open approach in such a way

that any interested person will be able to take part in the course. The topics of land conflicts' analysis, conflict management and conflict prevention are addressed and contextualized to the realities of Central Africa. To register for the MOOC please [contact NELGA via this form](#).



© Desola Lanre-Ologun on Unsplash, 2018

NUST – Workshop on “Research and Capacity Development Strategy for Land Governance Innovation in Southern Africa”

The NELGA Southern Africa Node, the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST), conducted on the 6 – 8 October 2020 an Online Workshop on “Research and Capacity Development Strategy for Land Governance Innovation in Southern Africa” through the collaborative platform MS-Teams. Participants included staff members of NELGA academic partner institutions from eight Southern African countries – Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Eswatini, Botswana and Lesotho – and representatives from the Namibian Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform. Presentations and discussion focused on the topics of research, capacity, curricula development and funding mobilization.

This online workshop notably led to the adoption of a Research Strategy and inputs submission for a Monitoring and Evaluation Matrix on the topic. The event helped to successfully foster collaborative research in the region and strengthen partnerships among stakeholders and partners of the NELGA network.

III. Online events: workshops, webinars and masterclasses

NELGA partners make extensive use of modern digital tools to organize online events, notably with the aim of promoting research in the field of land governance. Despite distance, stakeholders are enabled to meet and directly interact together through online tools. From young researchers' cooperation activities to experienced practitioners' knowledge exchange events, those online meetings constitute a unique opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to share experience and expertise.

Interdisciplinary group of Junior Researchers on Land in Central and West Africa

The interdisciplinary group of Junior Researchers on Land in Central Africa (*GICJFAC-NELGA – Groupe Interdisciplinaire Chercheurs Juniors sur le Foncier en Afrique Centrale*) was launched to support young and upcoming scientists in their research on land issues. It therefore mostly targets Master and PhD students, bringing them together and facilitating support and knowledge exchange with more senior researchers, thesis supervisors, etc. Students are offered a relevant framework for exchange, knowledge sharing and support in all aspects of their research (approach, methodology, documentation, networking, etc.). The initiative was pushed further due to the Covid-19 crisis as the whole animation of the network had to take a completely digital path. A full-fledged program for webinars and remote workshops has been developed, along with a collective communication platform's set-up via WhatsApp.



Online doctoral seminar

On June 2nd–3rd and 9–10th, a series of online doctoral seminars on research methodology for PhD students was organized by the NELGA West African node (University of Gaston Berger – Senegal), as part of their “*Training and Research*” programme. The event has been set up with the

support of a pool of professors from the whole west Africa region and IPAR (Agricultural and Rural Prospective Initiative), a regional think tank from civil society. Through these seminars, students and professors from different universities were therefore brought together to jointly reflect on certain methodological tools and keys to understand current land issues. It helped PhD students to develop research themes and enhanced their skills as future “land experts”.



© Frank Mintah

DAAD scholarship holders meetings

On August 18th and 19th 2020, the second DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Scholarship Holder and Alumni Meeting took place online. Since 2016 the DAAD, commissioned by the GIZ, has been supporting a comprehensive postgraduate scholarship programme at six African partner universities. The programme aims to train and support both young African scientists, more experienced professionals and researchers working / studying on land-related topics. The meeting focused on the topics “*Data for Land Governance in Africa*” and “*The Impact of Pandemics on Land in Africa*”. Activities included two parallel sessions; a panel discussion with professors and practitioners from Germany, Morocco, Ghana, Italy, and a “*Science Communication*” workshop. 62 scholarship holders and fellows as well as 20 alumni from a total of 15 countries were invited to participate. This online meeting has been an opportunity for scholarship holders and partners to gain significant insights on the covered topics to build stronger connections and exchange ideas, visions, and experiences across backgrounds and borders.

A great diversity notably characterized the audiences of the various NELGA webinars and online training in terms of expertise, age, gender and nationalities, contributing to the exchanges’ richness.

Results and lesson learnt

Between the set-up of online learning platforms, the conduct of numerous seminars and other forms of online exchanges including the development of full-fledge online training modules, NELGA partners are embracing remarkably diverse approaches to deliver “traditional” networking events, capacity development opportunities and even university lectures in completely digital ways.

Among the beneficiaries of these measures, both teachers and students positively welcomed universities’ learning platforms and successfully adopted new teaching /learning practices whilst enjoying greater flexibility and improved pedagogical experiences.

From these various experiences, we have observed that online events delivery generally foster inclusivity by bringing together actors who would not necessarily have had the opportunity to meet. They further constitute a great means to connect a wide

panel of both experienced and emerging land stakeholders from the entire African continent and offer younger members of the community, such as Masters and PhD students, the opportunity to actively raise their voice and be part of the debate. In addition, thanks to the possibilities of simultaneous and “costless” translation, completely bilingual (anglophone / francophone) events could easily take place. This inclusivity seems particularly pertinent when addressing the topic of land governance, as participatory reflection processes are key in dealing with such complex issues.

On the other hand, online and open access training do not necessarily promote exchanges, as these tend to be conducted individually. They however permit to reach a much wider audience. Through the development of such online modules, NELGA is able to extend its outreach, therefore contributing to the mainstreaming of land-related knowledge.

Throughout the implementation of these measures, we have observed a reduction in project implementation costs. Indeed, most of these online encounters have a lower organizational cost when compared to “in-person” settings: the provision of event venue, accommodation and per-diems becoming obviously irrelevant. Though, it is important to note that the development of open access training, such as MOOCs, may require substantial funding, however mitigated by the fact that these training formats have an almost unlimited outreach potential.

The Covid-19 Crisis has also hit NELGA: as a continental network, the subsequent travel restriction measures mainstreamed mobile working practices and virtual delivery of training and events. In this context, numerous activities initially planned “in-person” have been successfully implemented using digital means. It has notably been the case for the interdisciplinary group of junior researchers on land in Central Africa, the online doctoral seminar organized by NELGA West Africa as the DAAD Scholarship Holders Meeting aforementioned. Partners of the network have proven their capacities to cope with changing circumstances by mainstreaming the use of digital communication tools, strengthening online education and devel-

oping innovative practices of knowledge sharing. The sanitary crisis even became a topic for online seminars, such as an event organized by KNUST in September titled “How to conduct research under the COVID-19 pandemic”. The crisis undoubtedly acted as a catalyst for digital transformation and changes of practices within NELGA, and the network intends to sustain these achievements.

It is however important to note that NELGA partner institutions and activities’ participants encountered a few challenges along the way related to software knowledge and technical issues such as internet connectivity problems. In addition, the high costs of mobile data in Africa has been identified as an issue to participation to online gathering multiple times. Whenever possible, NELGA tries to identify the technical difficulties encountered by its partners and figure out the training needs in the use of online tools. NUST for instance conducted a comprehensive survey to assess regional stakeholders’ access to the internet and use of digital software before mainstreaming completely digital modes of cooperation in the pandemic context. Furthermore, some students, especially when living in remote and rural areas, sometimes faced internet or computer access issues. Reducing this digital divide by offering equal and pitfall free access to online activities remains an important challenge.

Conclusion

Since its establishment, NELGA strives to connect a wide array of land stakeholders across the entire African continent: **this could not possibly be achieved without embracing digital transformation.** In this regard, the use of digital tools for implementation of the various activities of the network is well established and quickly became part of NELGA working culture. Knowledge exchanges regularly take a virtual form, through online seminars or training modules for instance, professors of the network conduct part of their lectures through online learning platforms, etc.

NELGA successfully adopted innovative and digital practices to strengthen a continental dynamic surrounding land, to build the capacities of land practitioners and students, and to foster knowledge creation and sharing in the field. This experience helped the network in facing the COVID-19 pandemic and effectively continuing activities in this context. The crisis itself even further pushed the digital transformation of the network. NELGA can now count on the lessons learnt and its newly strengthened capacities to continue improving virtual activities and remote team work.

A wide range of online networking activities are planned in the coming months and will continue to enrich NELGA innovative experience in the field of land governance. It is now imperative to sustain the nodes achievements and strengthen the use of digital implementation formats as they are becoming essential tools of learning and cooperation.



NELGA

The **Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA)** is a partnership of leading African universities and research institutions with proven leadership in education, training and research on land governance. It strengthens capacities and knowledge exchange at more than **70 partner institutions** across Africa.

Published by
Strengthening Advisory Capacities for
Land Governance in Africa (SLGA) Programme

Fitawrari Damtew Road
P. O. Box 100009
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Phone +251 11 470 33 55

Responsible
Strengthening Advisory Capacities for
Land Governance in Africa (SLGA) Programme
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Design / Layout
W4 Büro für Gestaltung, Frankfurt / Germany

As at
April 2023

