



Communiqué on “Land Governance: Towards Modernizing Agriculture and Attaining Peace”

Issued following the Roundtable Discussion on Land and Resource Governance: Towards Modernizing Agriculture and Attaining Peace and Security held on 11 August 2025, Joy-Nostalg Hotel & Suites, Pasig City, Metro Manila, Philippines.

Background

Despite economic growth in recent years, poverty in the Philippines remains stubbornly rooted in the countryside. Farmers, fisherfolk, rural families, and indigenous peoples continue to bear the heaviest burden, with poverty rates in agricultural and rural areas nearly three times higher than in urban centers. Experts identify insecure land tenure and weak resource governance as critical barriers — factors that entrench poverty, discourage investment, impede agricultural modernization, and fuel conflict in vulnerable regions.

Over the past three decades, the Philippines has pursued landmark reforms, including the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), the Philippine Fisheries Code (PFC), and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA). These programs sought to redistribute land, strengthen tenure, and improve rural governance. While reforms have, on paper, transferred rights over 13.37 million hectares — nearly half the country’s land area — implementation remains incomplete. Overlapping claims, fragmented mandates, slow adoption, and persistent disputes continue to undermine their effectiveness.

Findings from recent studies — including the *ANGOC 2023 State of Land and Resource Tenure Reform*, the *2024 Discussion Paper on Land Tenure Security (ADB)*, and the *2024 Philippine Land and Resource Conflict Monitoring Report* — confirm that unresolved conflicts, insecure tenure, and weak protection for women, smallholders, and indigenous peoples remain central obstacles. In 2024 alone, over 262 unresolved land and resource disputes affected more than 100,000 households, many lasting for more than a decade. These issues are most acute in Mindanao, where unresolved land claims constrain peace and growth.

Roundtable Discussion

These challenges were the focus of the Roundtable Discussion on Land and Resource Governance in the Philippines: Towards Modernizing Agriculture and Attaining Peace and Security, held on 11 August 2025 in Manila. The event, organized by ANGO and SEARCA with support from Fair Finance Philippines, convened 35 representatives from government, civil society, academe, development partners, and grassroots organizations.

Participants examined key governance challenges, assessed reform gaps, and advanced proposals for the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023 to 2028 and the long-delayed National Land Use Act (NaLUA).

Key Issues Highlighted

The RTD reaffirmed that secure land and resource governance is central to agricultural modernization, inclusive growth, climate resilience, and peacebuilding in the Philippines. Secure tenure encourages farm productivity, attracts investment, and strengthens livelihoods, while weak governance and unclear property rights discourage innovation, fuel inequality, and drive rural unrest.

Vulnerable groups — including indigenous peoples, women, fisherfolk, and smallholder farmers — bear the brunt of tenure insecurity. Women, in particular, continue to face entrenched barriers in land ownership and decision-making, restricting their participation in agricultural value chains and weakening household resilience.

Participants highlighted that fragmented mandates, and weak enforcement exacerbate the problem. More than 20 laws and multiple agencies govern land use, often with overlapping or conflicting authority. The absence of a National Land Use Act (NaLUA), despite being a certified priority measure for over two decades, has prevented the creation of a coherent national framework for spatial planning and resource allocation. Weak enforcement of land conversion rules and outdated land-use classification systems further enable indiscriminate conversion of prime agricultural land to non-agricultural uses.

Key barriers identified include:

- Incomplete reform implementation, leaving millions without secure tenure;
- Gender and equity gaps that exclude women and indigenous peoples from full access to land rights;
- Weak data and transparency, with tenure maps and public databases largely unavailable;
- Fragmented mandates across more than 20 overlapping laws and agencies;
- Poor enforcement of land conversion rules, undermining food security; and,
- Prolonged conflicts that weaken rural development and peace efforts.

Participants agreed that addressing these barriers requires stronger policies, coherent institutional arrangements, and capacity building at both national and local levels. They stressed the importance of using technology and data for transparent land administration, while ensuring inclusive participation of grassroots communities.

Potentials for Agricultural Modernization

Secure land tenure is the cornerstone of agricultural modernization. When farmers have clear rights, they invest confidently, adopt sustainable practices, and engage in value chains. Conversely, insecurity from disputes, corruption, and weak governance suppresses innovation and discourages long-term planning. This is evident in sectors such as mango, onion, and

tomato farming, where tenure uncertainties, inefficient rental markets, and limited access to credit reduce productivity and sustainability.

Modernization requires more than infrastructure upgrades; it demands integrated strategies that combine inclusive agribusiness, social protection, and farming system transformation. Technology and data tools — such as digital mapping, artificial intelligence, and open platforms — can strengthen land governance, direct investments, and enhance transparency. In conflict-affected regions like Mindanao, secure tenure and climate-resilient agricultural corridors not only boost productivity but also serve as peacebuilding mechanisms.

Speakers highlighted the importance of strengthening value chains, building cross-sector partnerships, and embedding sustainability through adaptation financing, renewable energy, and natural capital investments. Experiences from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam showed similar challenges — informal tenure systems, overlapping laws, and weak compensation practices — that limit efficiency and credit access. Addressing these requires longer tenure arrangements, greater transparency, stronger grievance mechanisms, and protection for vulnerable groups, alongside responsible investments and cross-border knowledge sharing.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) outlined integrated investment programs to modernize Philippine agriculture. These cover value chain development, irrigation and flood control, natural resource management, social protection, and nutrition security. Its Food Systems Transformation Program further emphasizes climate-resilient value chains, natural capital investments, and healthier diets to reduce food insecurity. Likewise, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) applies a territorial, technology-driven approach — leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), high-tech mapping, and targeted investments to empower vulnerable communities and attract long-term private sector engagement.

Participants noted that financial institutions must promote responsible investments that respect indigenous rights, prevent land conflicts, and secure free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) from affected communities. They should conduct human rights-related due diligence especially in conflict-affected areas, and develop inclusive lending instruments that expand credit access for smallholder farmers, fisherfolk, women, and indigenous peoples.

In Mindanao, the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) stressed that tenure clarity is critical for peace, investor confidence, and economic growth. Agriculture accounts for 60 percent of Mindanao's GDP and over half of its workforce, with global export industries in bananas, seaweed, pineapples, rubber, and tuna. MinDA's strategy integrates land mapping, ancestral domain-inclusive agribusiness, conflict-sensitive investment corridors, renewable energy linkages, and digital innovation — positioning Mindanao as a hub for food security, regional trade, and inclusive growth.

Key takeaways included: the need for strategic frameworks from production to marketing; mechanization, technology adoption, and land consolidation for competitiveness; long-term public-private-community collaboration beyond election cycles; conflict-sensitive governance in indigenous areas; unified data systems for transparency; stronger LGU capacity; and, safeguards

to ensure social and environmental integrity. Together, these measures form a pathway toward inclusive, climate-resilient, and globally competitive agricultural modernization.

Policy Directions and Recommendations

Participants underscored the urgency of strengthening land and resource governance as the foundation for agricultural modernization, inclusive rural development, and sustainable peace. Key recommendations include:

Strengthen national policy and institutions

- o Pass the National Land Use Act (NaLUA) and establish a National Land Use Commission (NLUC).
- o Require LGUs to regularly update Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) with clear compliance mechanisms.

Advance agrarian and tenure reforms

- o Complete agrarian reform and provide targeted support services to beneficiaries.
- o Safeguard against illegal land conversion and strengthen grievance mechanisms.
- o Uphold ancestral domain rights and customary laws to protect indigenous peoples.

Promote inclusive and modernized agriculture

- o Support farm consolidation programs under the Department of Agriculture, without altering land ownership, to enable farmers to profit from cooperative services and economies of scale.
- o Expand mechanization training, strengthen producer-to-market market linkages, and community agribusiness ventures.
- o Enhance agricultural extension services devolved to LGUs.

Leverage technology and data

- o Modernize land governance through digital mapping, AI, and open-access databases.
- o Ensure transparency and public access to land information to prevent disputes and corruption.

Promote environmental sustainability and climate resilience

- o Integrate land governance with climate resilience and environmental protection.
- o Safeguard climate-related investments from tenure disputes.
- o Mobilize adaptation financing and scale up natural capital investments.

Link land governance with peacebuilding and regional development

- o Recognize secure tenure as a peacebuilding tool, especially in Mindanao.
- o Develop climate-resilient value chains, agro-industrial hubs, and food corridors.

Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships

- o Institutionalize inclusive participation across government, civil society, academe, private sector, and grassroots communities.
- o Support public awareness campaigns that promote secure land tenure, sustainable land use, and inclusive agricultural modernization.

Promote responsible investments

- o Promote responsible investments that prioritize marginalized groups, uphold community and indigenous rights, and channel financing toward farm productivity, market access, and inclusive rural enterprises.
- o Strengthen regional and South-South cooperation on technology, capacity building, climate adaptation, and food systems.
- o Safeguard land rights especially in land-use conversions and policy shifts, ensuring that investment policies align with human rights and environmental sustainability standards.

Conclusion

As emphasized by Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon of the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev), effective land and resource governance cannot be achieved by government alone. It requires multi-stakeholder collaboration that bridges institutional priorities with grassroots realities, while embedding transparency, accountability, and innovation in governance systems.

Strengthening land governance is not only an economic imperative — it is also a matter of social justice, environmental sustainability, and peacebuilding. ■

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