



Call for papers

International conference on the road to ICARRD+20

Land, Life and Society

A global conversation about the politics of land and resource struggles in an era of global and local crises

7-9 October 2025

University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

This conference presents an opportunity for scholars and students, practitioners and policymakers, activists and allies, to assess the state of knowledge and define a forward-looking agenda on land and agrarian reform ahead of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD). Taking place in March 2026 and hosted by the government of Colombia, this next ICARRD comes 20 years after the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization's first global agrarian reform conference. The Cape Town conference aims to assess evidence and develop positions to shape this global forum.

Urgent attention is needed to the challenges of land and agrarian reform in the contemporary world, especially in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South. Today, intersecting crises, the rise of authoritarian populism and far-reaching processes of financialisation are affecting rural worlds globally. Land, water and rare earth minerals present new opportunities for accumulation of wealth, often in the name of carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and the decoupling of economic growth from resource-intensive industries. All combine to further escalate competition for land and other natural resources. Rural people with livelihoods anchored in small-scale farming, small-scale fishing and artisanal mining face massive old and new pressures. For the most marginalised communities in rural and urban spaces, the results of these interventions are predictable and familiar: land dispossession, jobless de-agrarianisation and political alienation.

Across five themes, we will engage with issues of agrarian reform and rural development - land, oceans and fisheries, climate and environment, food, and politics - and ask: what can be done to heal the frayed interconnections between people, land and nature? What can make life liveable for people, and for non-human species? How can effective climate action advance land rights and land justice, and avoid climate-induced land grabs? What can be learnt from emergent, or renewed, alternatives like commoning, citizen science, women's movements, youth activism, legal strategies, and novel forms of alliances, solidarity and struggle? How can sustainable farming and food systems, participatory democracy, and clean energy converge, and where do we see these in evidence? What are the critical new understandings of land, agrarian change and rural development unfolding across different academic, stakeholder, and community-based fora? And, in turn, what does all this suggest for framing the ICARRD+20 conference agenda in 2026 in intellectual, practical and policy terms?

The core conference programme will be three intensive days at the university campus, combining keynote inputs from leading scholars, mostly from the Global South, with dynamic paper and dialogue sessions with scholars, activists and policy leaders.

We expect 200-300 participants from over 30 countries, mostly from Africa, Latin America and Asia. We will run social media and real-time updates, with rapporteurs summarising outcomes of discussions for sharing among participants.

Please note that this is an in-person event and will not be livestreamed.

The conference will be the platform for side-events and pre- and post-conference workshops, field trips, and project meetings.

The conference brings together PLAAS's partners from the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa, the Land Deal Politics Initiative, the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative, the BRICS Initiative in Critical Agrarian Studies, and other academic partnerships.



This conference marks the 30th anniversary of the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS). Many scholars, policymakers and activists who have studied or worked in or with PLAAS and its partners will contribute to the conference. On the first evening of the conference, a special celebration of PLAAS will take place, involving diverse guest speakers, and will culminate in a PLAAS birthday party.



In keeping with PLAAS tradition, the purposes of the conference is an invitation to enter a robust debate and to build from critique towards action through dialogue and analysis. The programme will draw together evidence from research, in dialogue with practice and activism, to investigate, inform, critique, reimagine, and share across multiple global audiences - to spark new connections and directions for scholarship that can make an impact as part of preparations for ICARRD+20.

Conference themes

We welcome proposals for panels and individual papers under five themes, along the lines indicated below. Drawing these themes together on the final day, we will convene a high-level panel of academics, activists and policymakers to discuss key priorities for ICARRD+20. The result will be a series of thematic briefings contributing to framing a forward-looking agenda for ICARRD+20.

LAND AND AGRARIAN REFORM

The ICARRD+20 conference seeks to define new directions for agrarian reform. At the centre of this are questions about land. We will address international voluntary guidelines and other governance frameworks for defining land use and tenure in response to land grabbing, plus new perspectives on land redistribution alongside issues of labour and radical commoning. We will address:

- Land Redistribution: State, Market and People-Driven Reforms
- International Land Governance Frameworks: Implementing the Voluntary Guidelines
- Regional Land Governance Frameworks: Experiences with the African Land Agenda
- Land Inequality, Land Concentration and Land Grabbing: Drivers and Responses
- Gender and Generation: Axes of Exclusion, Contestation and Struggle
- African Land Tenure: Beyond Legal Pluralism and the Formalisation Fix
- Land and Labour: Farm Workers, Labour Politics and Demands for Land
- The Commons as Alternative? Diverse Forms of Commoning

OCEAN AND WATER

The agrarian reform and rural development agenda at ICARRD+20 needs to draw on critical scholarship and solidarity movement building among fishers to challenge harmful and destructive corporate fisheries, aquaculture, and mining extractivism of oil and gas which displace small-scale fishers. This theme will also galvanise evidence on mainstream conservation tools like marine protected areas and spatial planning, and the Global Biodiversity Framework of 30X30 - and alternative pathways for marine conservation.

- Small-scale Fisheries Reform: Experiences with the Voluntary Guidelines
- Small-scale Fishers and Resistance: Building International Solidarity Across Struggles
- Gender Activism in the Blue Economy: Struggles for Decriminalised Livelihoods
- Displacement through Marine Conservation: Securitisation, Militarisation and Criminalisation
- Blue Justice in Marine Conservation: Protected Areas, Spatial Planning, and 30X30
- Reclaiming the Commons: Aquatic Tenure Systems, Rights, Access, Territorial Use, and Self-governance

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

Central to ICARRD+20 debates about agrarian and rural development are questions of climate and environmental justice in the context of 'green grabbing'. In this theme we will explore the possibilities for a new politics of land and nature as part of agrarian reform agendas. We will address:

- Climate Crisis and the Politics of Just Energy Transitions
- (Re)valuing Nature: Nature-based Solutions
- Migration and Climate Crisis: Ecological Roots of Conflict and Human Migration
- Climate Justice and Gender Equity: Distributing the Labour Burden
- Beyond the Fortress: Conservation, People, Ecology and Social Justice
- Critical Minerals: Extractivism and Rural Ecologies and Livelihoods

FOOD

ICARRD+20 will explore how agrarian reform and rural development can deliver just food systems globally. This requires an exploration of the politics of food systems within a fast-changing technological, financial and geopolitical context, where relationships with land are central. We will address:

- The Expanded BRICS and the Geopolitics of the Global Food System
- From Seed to Supermarkets: Food System Concentration and Alternative Markets
- Youth and Demographic Dimensions of Alternative Food Systems
- Fish as Food and Nutrition: Food Sovereignty and Fishers
- Technologies of Power: Financialisation and Digitalisation in Agro-Food Systems
- Social Reproduction, Production and Struggles for Food Justice in the Polycrisis
- Agroecology and Food Sovereignty as Counter-Movements

POLITICS

Cutting across the above themes are questions of *politics*. Interrogating political, legal and institutional processes in both constraining and opening up possibilities for agrarian reform and inclusive rural development is central to realising the ambitions of ICARRD+20. We will address:

- Authoritarian Populism, Democracy and Inequality in Agrarian Reform Agendas
- Rural Social Movements: Small-scale Farmers and Fishers and Emerging Alliances
- Unruly Land Politics: Occupation, Conflict and Violence in Urban and Rural Spaces
- Social Differentiation, Politics and Emancipatory Futures through Agrarian Change
- Migration and the Rise of Right-wing Rural Politics
- Re-assessing Law and Litigation as Methods of Struggle
- Scholar-Activism and the Roles of Intellectuals in Agrarian Struggles

Would you like to participate?

Register your interest in the conference via the button below.

[Register here](#)

Conference timeline

10 March 2025	Call for papers
April 2025	Full programme
July 2025	Registration deadline
September 2025	Papers are due

The conference is hosted by the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies ([PLAAS](#)), University of the Western Cape
in collaboration with the Land Deal Politics Initiative ([LDPI](#))



Visit the [conference webpage](#) for updates
Contact: conference@plaas.org.za