



NELGA GOOD PRACTICES:

Strengthening Research Communication for Policy Impact

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 organised into six regional nodes and one technical node, supported by a Secretariat.



Background

Across Africa, significant investment in land governance research has generated valuable knowledge and evidence to address critical challenges in land governance.

However, despite the growing strategic relevance of land governance and increased investment in the sector, a persistent challenge remains: research outputs or findings often do not effectively influence policy, investment, and practice.

This gap is not due to a lack of knowledge, but rather due to how that knowledge is packaged, communicated and translated into policy and practice.

Recognising this structural gap, the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA), with support from the Strengthening Advisory Capacities for Land Governance in Africa (SLGA) programme, initiated a more strategic and practice-oriented approach to research communication.

This approach moves beyond traditional academic dissemination and focuses on transforming research into accessible, actionable and policy-relevant outputs.

Rationale: Why Research Communication Matters

Research communication is central to evidence-based decision-making.

In the African land governance context, weak coordination and collaboration among academia, policymakers, the media and private-sector actors have limited the uptake of research findings. Academic outputs are often highly technical, lengthy and not tailored to decision-makers' needs, priorities or time realities.

Recognising this challenge, NELGA identified the need to reposition research communication as a strategic priority and a core competency for strengthening the policy relevance and societal impact of research. The objective was to ensure that research findings could inform real-world decisions, influence policy processes and contribute to sustainable land governance outcomes across the continent.





NELGA's Integrated Approach

To address these challenges, NELGA adopted a **comprehensive, multilayered and ecosystem-based approach to research communication**.

Rather than relying on a single intervention, it combined capacity development, communication tools, digital learning platforms, policy-oriented knowledge products, partnership engagement and follow-up support to create a sustainable system for research uptake.

1. Research Communication Training Workshop

From research to real-world impact: building skills, connections and influence

In March 2024, researchers, policymakers, media professionals and private sector actors gathered in Dar es Salaam with a shared concern: how to ensure that research moves beyond academic publication and contributes meaningfully to policy, investment, and practice.

For many participants, research had traditionally remained confined to technical reports and scholarly journals, often inaccessible to decision-makers and insufficiently connected to real-world governance processes.

The **NELGA Research Communication Workshop** was designed to address this challenge by strengthening the capacity of stakeholders to communicate research in more accessible, relevant and action-oriented ways. Participants engaged in a highly interactive learning process aimed at improving how land governance evidence is translated, communicated and used across sectors.

The workshop:

- Applied a hands-on, practical **design thinking approach** that moved beyond conventional lecture-based training methods – participants did not just learn about communication, they practised it
- Enabled researchers to better understand policymakers' demands for **concise, timely and actionable insights**
- Facilitated **collaboration between media professionals and academics** to translate complex land governance issues into compelling and accessible narratives
- Provided **policymakers** with opportunities to directly **engage with researchers** to articulate what makes evidence most effective for informing policy processes and decision-making

The collaborative and practice-oriented nature of the workshop saw abstract discussions evolve into tangible outputs.





Participants developed draft policy briefs, infographics, short videos and digital communication content tailored to diverse audiences and communication platforms. These outputs reflected a broader shift from traditional academic dissemination towards more audience-centred and impact-oriented approaches to research communication.

Beyond technical capacity development, the workshop also created a valuable platform for dialogue and cross-sectoral engagement. Through structured group work and informal exchanges, participants built relationships across sectors that often operate in isolation from one another.

These interactions strengthened mutual understanding and opened opportunities for future collaboration, including joint communication products and engagement through the NELGA network.

Importantly, the workshop contributed to a changing perception of the role of research within governance and development processes. Research was increasingly viewed not simply as an academic product, but as a strategic resource for informing dialogue, shaping policy debates, supporting institutional learning and strengthening evidence-based decision-making.

Participants left the workshop not only with practical communication tools and products but also with a deeper appreciation of their role in bridging the gap between knowledge generation and societal impact. The experience reinforced the importance of research communication as a critical component of strengthening the visibility, relevance and influence of land governance research across Africa.



[Watch](#) key takeaways from NELGA's Research Communication Workshop.



2. Online Course: Maximising Research Impact – Driving Change and Making a Difference

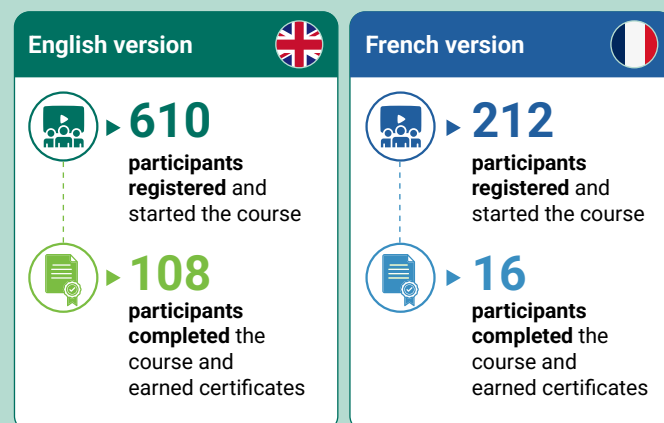
To expand its reach beyond in-person engagements and ensure continuity of learning, NELGA developed a self-paced online course titled “**Maximising Research Impact: Driving Change and Making a Difference**”. Designed as a practical and accessible learning tool, the course equips researchers and young professionals with essential skills to communicate research more effectively and enhance its relevance for policy and practice.



The online course reflects NELGA's broader commitment to promoting more inclusive, scalable and sustainable approaches to research communication.

Accessible in both [English](#) and [French](#) and optimised for mobile use, the 60-minute course allows participants across Africa to learn at their own pace and on their own schedule. This flexibility has significantly broadened participation, particularly among students, early-career researchers and practitioners who may have limited opportunities to engage in the in-person workshops or training programmes.

Course reach to date:



Thus far, the course has reached **822 learners across Africa**, strengthening access to practical research communication skills and supporting the translation of research into policy and practice.



The course focuses on practical competencies that are often underrepresented in traditional academic training. Participants learn how to map and engage audiences, translate technical research findings into clear and compelling messages, and use storytelling techniques to improve accessibility and public engagement.



3. NELGA Policy Brief Series

Turning research into simple messages

The NELGA Policy Brief Series was created to make research easier to understand and more useful for decision-making. It responds to a common challenge raised during the NELGA Research Communication Workshop in Dar es Salaam: research is often strong, but not always presented in a way that policymakers and practitioners can quickly use.



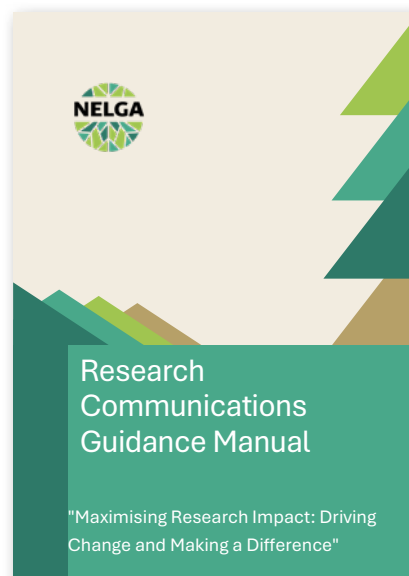
The briefs distil complex research findings into short, clear and focused messages that highlight key issues and evidence and offer practical recommendations in a simple format.

Each brief focuses on priority land governance topics such as land tenure security, land distribution, land use planning and the monitoring of land reforms. This helps ensure that research speaks directly to real policy needs.

[Access](#) the full Policy Brief Series.

4. Research Communications Guidance Manual

To complement its capacity development efforts and ensure sustained learning beyond workshops and online training, NELGA developed the **Research Communication Reference Guide** ([English](#) | [French](#)) – a practical and user-friendly toolkit designed to help researchers translate knowledge into accessible, policy-relevant and action-oriented communication products.



Recognizing that many researchers struggle to communicate complex findings to non-academic audiences, the manual provides clear and actionable guidance on how to package, adapt, and communicate research for policy, media and public engagement.

A key strength of the manual lies in its grounding in real-world African experiences and practices. Drawing on case studies from across Africa, the guide showcases how research has successfully informed land governance processes, offering users practical inspiration and replicable approaches.

It also introduces essential competencies for effective research communication, including audience mapping, storytelling, stakeholder engagement, message development and strategic communication planning, equipping researchers to build stronger connections with policymakers, media actors, civil society organisations and development actors.



Conclusion

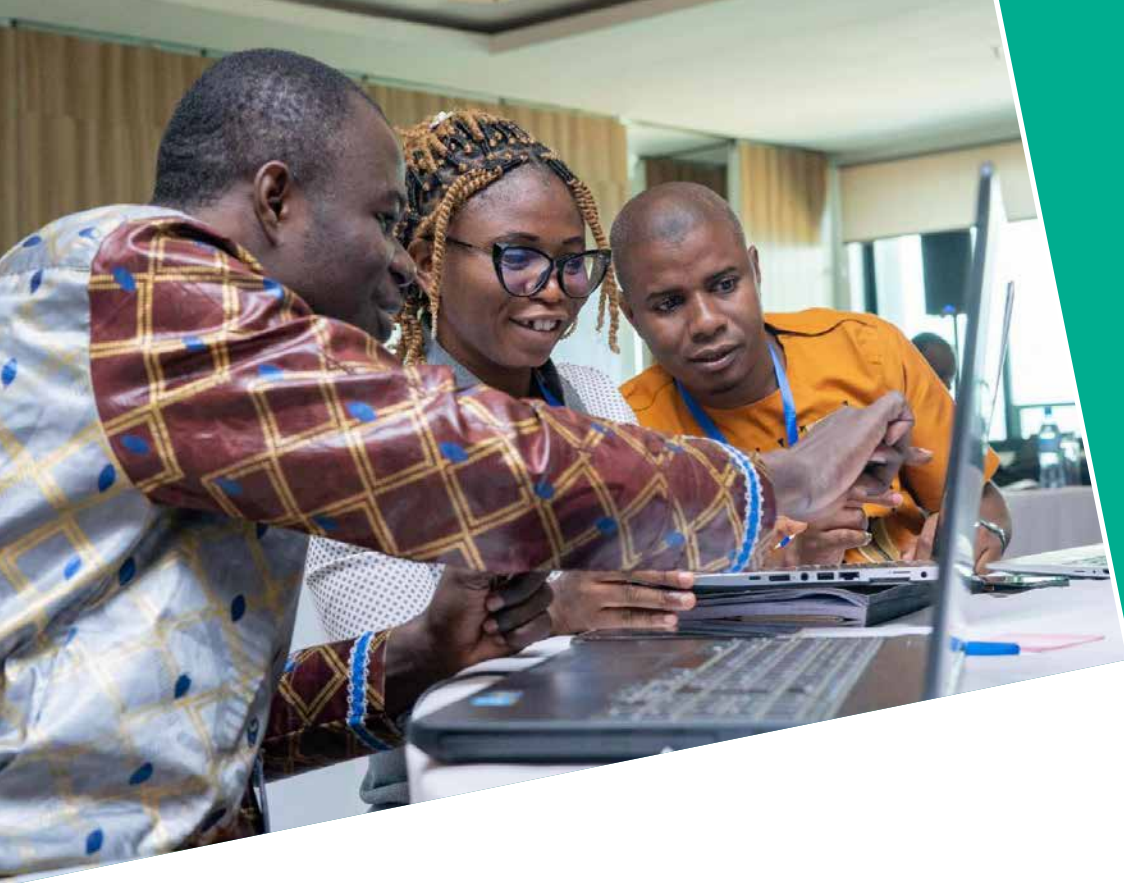
NELGA's experience demonstrates that effective research communication goes beyond sharing research outputs; it requires creating meaningful connections between researchers, policymakers, practitioners, media actors and knowledge platforms.

Practical engagement opportunities proved essential in helping participants translate research into accessible and impactful communication products. For example, connecting researchers with communication experts, journalists, AI practitioners and platforms such as the Land Portal strengthened their ability to reach wider audiences and increase the visibility and uptake of their research.

The experience also showed the value of adapting approaches to specific contexts. Following the initial training, the model was replicated in Ghana with adjustments to reflect the national context and participant needs, demonstrating the potential for scaling and localisation.

At the same time, lessons learned highlighted that online-only formats have limitations in supporting interactive learning, networking and relationship-building. A blended approach that combines digital learning with opportunities for face-to-face exchange can better support sustained engagement and practical application of research communication skills.





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