



## NELGA GOOD PRACTICES: NELGA Université Gaston Berger Experience in **Supporting Youth**

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.



## Background

“Build sufficient human, financial, and technical capacity to support the development and implementation of land policies.” This is the appeal made by AU Member States and the basis for the development of Land Investment Guidelines guidelines. While the 2009 Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges in Africa emphasised the need for Member States to build adequate human, financial, and technical capacity to support the development and implementation of land policies, the 2014 Land Investment Guidelines reiterated this need. These guidelines also underscored the **importance of developing capacity** at all levels of engagement in the processes related to the implementation, monitoring, and review of investments. In addition to strengthening university programmes and capacity in this area, these concerns raise fundamental questions about succession in the sector linked to land and natural resource governance.

## UGB Actions in Favour of Young People

Recognising the importance of youth in current development policies early on, NELGA Université Gaston Berger (UGB) has made supporting young people working on land issues a priority in its activities. Since its establishment in 2019, the Université Gaston Berger (UGB) has been **promoting youth-sensitive land governance** by giving this group an active role. This commitment is reflected in various actions taken to support young people.

### 1. Survey and Mapping of Young Land Professionals and Researchers

The need to build the capacity of young people and involve them in land-related decision-making processes has been a priority for NELGA-UGB from its earliest days. From its inception in December 2018, this issue was prioritised in its action plan through a **census of young researchers and professionals** working on land tenure across its eight member countries (Mali,

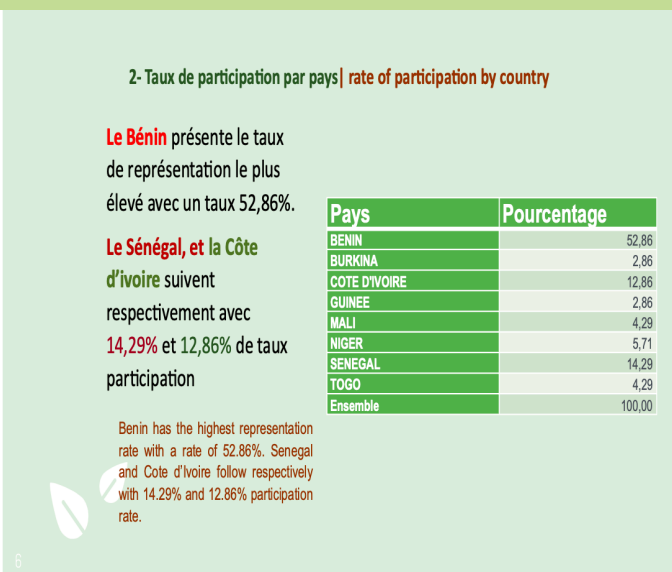
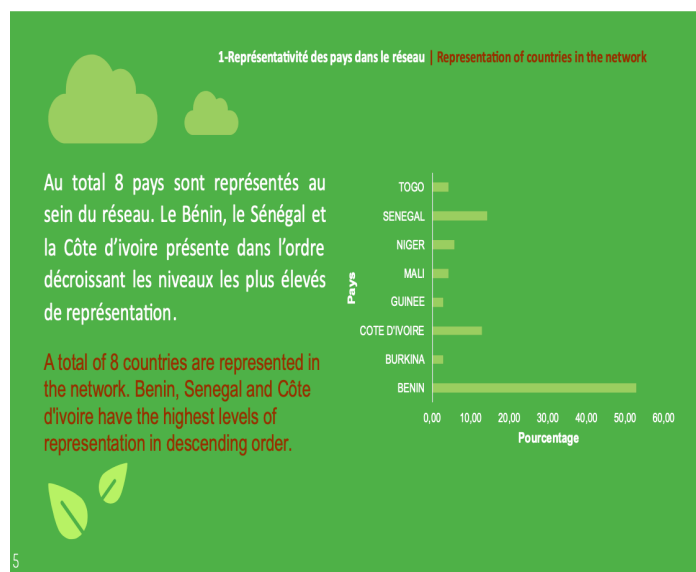




Guinea, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Togo, Senegal, and Benin). **This study, conducted by young people themselves** through the Youth Initiative on Land Tenure (YILAA), provided the UGB with a directory of young researchers and professionals involved in land tenure and a clearer understanding of the region's existing potential.

The study identified **70 skilled professionals** across the eight NELGA member countries in French-speaking West Africa.

See the diagram below



## 2. Support for Networking

As a follow-up to this inventory work, the UGB provided technical and financial support for the first **"Youth Land Forum,"** held in Benin in December 2020. This conference, attended by around 50 young people from across the continent, was the first of its kind. The young participants took the floor to express their needs regarding access to land and called on political decision-makers, traditional authorities, and technical and financial partners to promote land governance that recognises the importance of youth in decision-making bodies.

Addressing the challenges and potential impact of young people on the sustainable economies of African states, the participants emphasised difficulties in accessing land and the lack of awareness of land-

related professions as significant factors contributing to high unemployment rates. To tackle these challenges, the participants unanimously recognised the need to create a framework for sharing experiences, giving hope to young people, and using capacity building as a tool to help identify opportunities in the land governance sector.

As part of its support for networking and to **foster better communication** between student-researchers and their supervisors, the UGB has created a platform for exchanging and sharing knowledge, where all members of the network, regardless of their status, can interact and present their views. This platform not only **facilitates the supervision of researchers' work** but also keeps young people informed about current events and emerging land issues on the continent.



### 3. Support for Research and Capacity-Building for Young People

The **Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis** recognised early on that the future of land governance depends on promoting young people through training and capacity building. Its first significant step in this direction was the establishment of a **Centre of Excellence in Land Governance**. This well-equipped centre, complete with books, dissertations on land tenure, office equipment, and Wi-Fi, provides researchers with access to a wealth of diverse and relevant documentation on land tenure. It also serves as a space where students can gather to discuss their research work.

In the same vein, **NELGA UGB** has been organising annual doctoral seminars for the network's PhD students. These seminars offer an opportunity to review students' research progress, providing guidance on methodology, bibliography, and other aspects. They also help prepare doctoral students for their viva voce, by giving them the chance to present their research progress to a jury, share the challenges they face, and discuss future prospects. A scientific committee has been established to monitor doctoral students throughout their theses.

### 4. Setting Up a Mentoring System of Young People

In addition to these initiatives, a **mentoring system** for young people has been established. This programme, dedicated to doctoral students, complements the Land Governance Master's programme, which was introduced in 2020. Entitled "Land Governance and Territorial Management" (GFGT), this master's programme was created with the support of SLGA. Now in its third year, it offers a multidisciplinary training programme designed to meet the demands of the job market. The first cohort consists of 30 recent graduates, some of whom have already entered the job market. This integration has been facilitated both by the quality of the training and by NELGA

UGB's collaboration with the bilateral GIZ "Seen Suuf" project, which engaged all the programme's graduates in internships.

With the goal of addressing **land tenure comprehensively**, UGB is planning to launch a professional degree in land tenure. A **feasibility study** has already been conducted, and it is highly likely that the programme will begin this year.

In addition to establishing appropriate training programmes, UGB is encouraging young researchers by introducing them to **action research**, allowing them to apply the knowledge gained during their studies. Between 2022 and 2023, UGB awarded five research grants to young researchers to produce scientific articles on NELGA priority themes. A compilation of these articles was published in a special edition of the "Cahiers Fonciers du NELGA" by Harmattan.

### 5. Support for Labour Market Integration

NELGA's primary concern is **building capacity and establishing appropriate training programmes**. Recently, GIZ, one of the network's financial partners, has shown increasing interest in the issue of integrating young graduates from these programmes into the job market. In collaboration with the Senegal country package, two flagship studies have been commissioned to better understand this issue. The first study concerns the production of a baseline report on the **integration of young land graduates into the job market**, while the second, currently underway, explores self-entrepreneurship opportunities for land graduates.

Following the completion of the first study, a multi-stakeholder dialogue was held in October 2023. During this event, all stakeholders, particularly young graduates, shared their **experiences and challenges in finding employment**.

In the same vein, the newly established Committee of Land Practitioners (COPRAF) supports young graduates in integrating into professional networks and entering the land governance sector.







## Conclusion

For the **NELGA-UGB node in French-speaking West Africa**, promoting research and supporting young researchers are **two key strategies** for ensuring the sustainability of its activities. Indeed, knowledge and youth are the cornerstones of development. For **Africa**, **land is a critical resource** for development, and its complexity demands extensive research and dynamic, skilled young professionals to address the challenges and opportunities it presents. While many questions remain unanswered, the human resources required to find appropriate solutions and meet the continent's challenges are ageing.

With the rapid advancement of technology and the rise of digitalisation, **land management** now requires **innovative approaches**, with digital tools at the core of land governance. This need for innovation calls for **dynamic young people** with proven technical skills. Since 2019, NELGA UGB has recognised this necessity and has been working diligently to meet it. While significant progress has been made, challenges still remain. The new GIZ initiative to integrate young graduates into the land sector is a perfect example of this ongoing effort.





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