



## NELGA GOOD PRACTICES:

# Building an Africa-Led Model for Land Governance Training

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.



## 1. Executive Summary

Between 2018 and 2025, the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape delivered a proven, Africa-centred capacity-building model through the **Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa** course. During this period, the programme trained **406 land-governance professionals from 40 countries, with women representing up to 54%**.

The programme's success rests on six validated good approaches: Africa-centred pedagogy and critical political-economy approaches, gender equality and inclusive participation, adaptive and blended learning delivery, partnership and policy linkages, a strong alumni network and continuous learning, and evidence-based monitoring and reflexive improvement.

These practices translated into measurable outcomes: at least **68% of alumni** now contribute to policy or advisory work, and gender integration shows strong uptake, with **82% of women** applying gender-analysis tools in their institutions. Together, these practices have created an active continental community of practice and a scalable, low-cost, contextually grounded model ready for replication across other African universities and regional hubs.

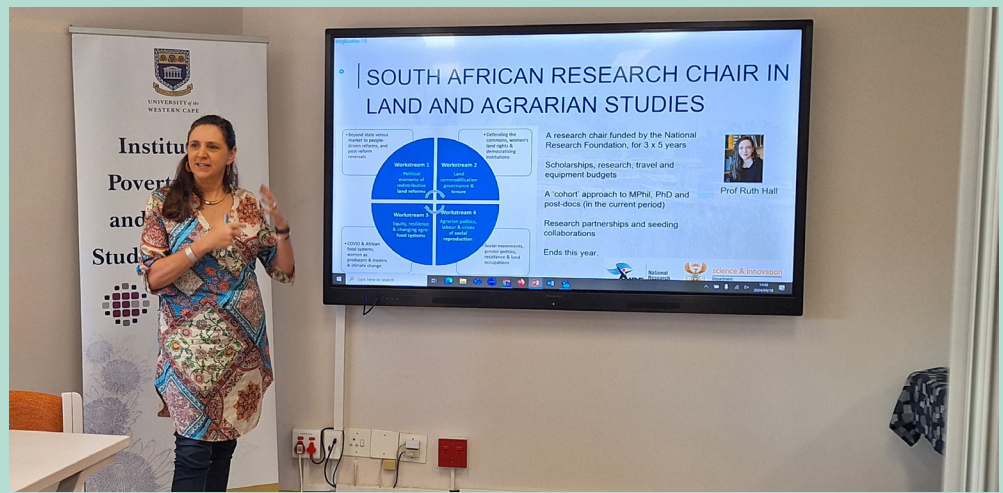
Sustainability will require the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to continue embedding the course within its Continuing Education Programme (CEP), supported by diversified financing (including modest fees), and strengthened partnerships with the African Union (AU), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) as the host of the current host of the African Land Policy Centre (ALPC), and national governments. Expansion opportunities include Francophone and Arabic delivery, thematic micro-courses, and regional franchises through collaboration with NELGA Nodes in West, North, and Central Africa.

Overall, PLAAS has adopted effective and transferable good practices that have built a transformative, Africa-led learning ecosystem now shaping land-governance policy, research, and practice across the continent.

## 2. Introduction

This good practice is based on the flagship short course, *The Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa*, which has been delivered annually from 2018 to 2025. The course brings together practitioners, policymakers, and researchers from across the continent for intensive analytical training that examines the political-economy drivers of land governance, from historical dispossession to contemporary reforms. Through interactive and dialogic learning, it equips participants to apply critical, evidence-based approaches in their institutional contexts.

Synthesising tracer studies, alumni surveys, external evaluations, and programme monitoring confirms a set of practical and transferable approaches that have built



a transformative, Africa-led learning ecosystem now shaping land-governance policy, research, and practice across the continent. The Good Practice is presented through three integrated components: the six validated approaches; pathways for scaling and replication; and the key lessons and future priorities that will guide continued strengthening of land-governance capacity.



## 3. Validation of Six Effective Approaches

### Effective Approach 1: Africa-Centred Pedagogy and Critical Political-Economy Approach

PLAAS's curriculum is grounded in African scholarship, histories, and lived experience. This approach counters externally driven, technocratic models by situating land-governance debates in long-term political-economy processes such as colonial dispossession, customary authority, class formation, gendered access, and climate and resource pressures. The course uses dialogic facilitation, structured debates, and intergenerational co-teaching to strengthen participants' analytical autonomy and reflexive practice. This pedagogical model directly responds to the gaps identified in the [NELGA Needs Assessment \(2017\)](#), which called for transformative learning rather than procedural competence.

Alumni testimonies describe the course as a turning point in their analytical practice and teaching methods:

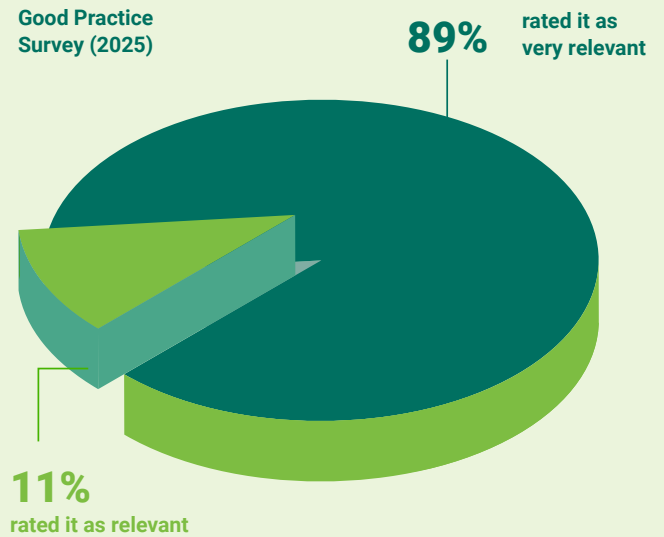


*'It was the first time I saw land issues framed politically and historically, not just technically,' noted a government participant from the 2022 cohort, while an academic alumnus from 2021 reflected that 'the course transformed how I teach my university students about land rights'.*

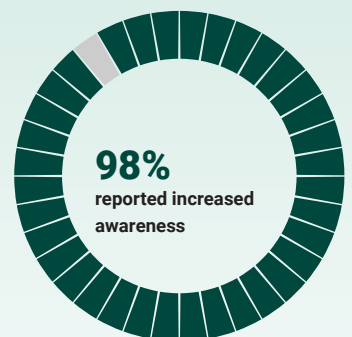
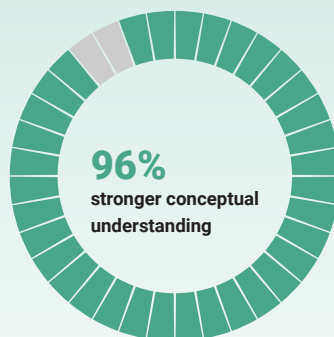
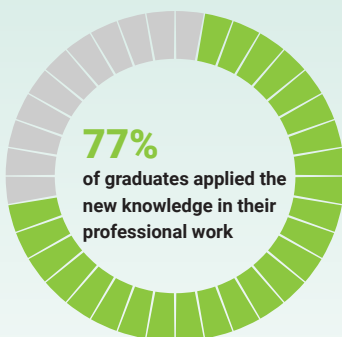


According to the **Good Practice Survey (2025)**, 89 percent of respondents rated the course as "very relevant," while the remaining 11 percent rated it as "relevant." This means that 100 percent of surveyed alumni found the course either very relevant (89%) or very relevant (11%) to their professional needs and contexts. **The Tracer and Impact Study (2024)** found that 98 percent reported increased awareness and 96 percent stronger conceptual understanding. Importantly, 77 percent of graduates applied the new knowledge in their professional work, while 88 percent confirmed a positive impact on their day-to-day practice.

Good Practice Survey (2025)



### The Tracer and Impact Study (2024)



This approach aligns closely with AU Agenda 2063's vision for African-owned knowledge production by embedding local perspectives and critical analysis at the centre of training. The model's sustainability has been initiated through its incorporation into UWC's CEP, with full continuity dependent on securing long-term financing and strategic partnerships. Its replicability is demonstrated by the open sharing of curriculum materials with NELGA Nodes in Tanzania, Ghana, and Namibia.

## Effective Approach 2: Gender Equality and Inclusive Participation

From its inception, the *The Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa* treated gender parity not as a numeric requirement but as a pedagogical principle. Recruitment, curriculum content, and facilitation styles were all designed to foreground women's voices and analyse how gender relations shape land rights and governance. The objective was to build a new cohort of African land professionals who can mainstream gender justice in policy, research, and practice.

Between 2018 and 2025, 44% of participants were women, with the 2023 cohort achieving 54% female representation. The Tracer Study (2024) reported that 82 percent of female alumni applied gender-analysis frameworks in their professional work, compared with 68 percent of men. Gender sessions consistently ranked among the most valued modules, and participant feedback confirmed the cultural and intellectual shift achieved:

“

*For once, gender was not an afterthought but part of every topic, from customary tenure to climate policy,” – observed a female participant (2023).*

”

The model advances the **AU Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa** by mainstreaming gender throughout training rather than isolating it.

## Effective Approach 3: Adaptive and Blended Learning Delivery

When COVID-19 disrupted mobility in 2020, PLAAS rapidly re-engineered its *Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa* short course for online and hybrid delivery. This shift safeguarded learning continuity while expanding geographic reach beyond the original face-to-face cohorts in Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, and Accra. The transition was not a simple digitisation exercise but a pedagogical redesign: interactive webinars replaced in-person lectures; breakout rooms simulated group debates; and moderators supported inclusive participation. The approach demonstrated how an African university can deliver high-quality, discussion-based training to practitioners across the continent despite resource and bandwidth constraints.

The transition to online and hybrid formats during and after COVID-19 maintained strong learning outcomes while expanding access across 40 African countries. Other PLAAS courses delivered virtually also demonstrated high effectiveness, for example, the 2025 *Climate Change and Land Governance* pilot, where 100% of participants reported they were likely or most likely to apply their new knowledge, with satisfaction scores averaging 4.6/5.

Comparative tracer data showed learning gains equivalent to those in earlier in-person cohorts. Participants valued the interactivity of the digital model:

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*“The online platform gave me access to scholars I could never meet physically, it turned distance into dialogue,” – one Central Africa participant (2025).*

”

However, findings from the Good Practice Survey (2025) reveal that 50 percent of respondents experienced technical challenges during online sessions, including poor internet connectivity, limited data bundles, and power outages. To support equitable participation, PLAAS provided offline course materials.

## Effective Approach 4: Partnership and Policy Linkages

A cornerstone of PLAAS's success as NELGA's Technical Node has been its ability to bridge academic knowledge and policy processes through sustained partnership. The collaboration between PLAAS (UWC), ALPC (UNECA), and SLGA (GIZ) established a tri-partite structure that links research, capacity-building, and policy dialogue.

This partnership model positioned PLAAS not merely as a training provider but as a continental knowledge hub shaping debates on land reform, customary tenure, women's land rights, and climate governance. The approach reflects a key SLGA goal: strengthening advisory capacities within African institutions rather than outsourcing training to external actors.

Interviews illustrated tangible institutional influence:

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*“We drew on the PLAAS course material to draft our ministry’s new Land Governance Capacity Strategy,”*

*– noted a senior official in Ghana*

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“

*“The course gave us the language and confidence to engage policymakers on customary tenure.”*

*– Findings from the Good Practice Survey (2025)*

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Findings from the Good Practice Survey (2025) further show that alumni continue to apply skills and knowledge gained from the courses in multiple professional domains: influencing policy (33%), designing projects (29%), teaching initiatives (21%), pursuing further studies (13%), and other areas (4%). As one respondent reflected, “I integrated the knowledge from the sessions into my lectures and practical exercises for students, improving their understanding of land governance, tenure, and land law.” (Good Practice Survey, 2025).



## Effective Approach 5: Alumni Network and Continuous Learning

PLAAS recognised early that one-off short courses were insufficient to sustain behavioural and institutional change, and therefore cultivated a continental alumni network using low-cost, alumni-led digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, Google Groups, webinars, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom masterclasses. These platforms enabled continuous peer learning and collaboration across 40 countries without the need for formal or expensive institutional structures.

As the PLAAS Director highlighted in an interview, this alumni network functions as a Community of Practice (CoP) for African land professionals, spanning ministries, civil society organisations, academia, and private-sector actors. They continue to share lessons, co-author research, and influence policy. The approach moves beyond conventional training evaluation toward continuous professional development and mutual accountability.

From the Tracer Study (2024), an exceptional 97 percent of alumni remain within the NELGA network through WhatsApp groups, webinars, and peer mentoring. In addition, the Good Practice Survey (2025) shows that 62 percent of alumni in WhatsApp groups remain actively engaged. Alumni also reported multiple forms of ongoing collaboration: 29 percent engaged in joint projects or collaborations, 27 percent participated in various academic or professional events, 20 percent were involved in publications or policy dialogues, 12 percent in research funding opportunities, and 12 percent in direct policy dialogues.

As one participant observed,

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*“My network has increased since I started working with NELGA and PLAAS. I attended a number of events, including the last [PLAAS] conference on land, life, and society. I am now working with many colleagues in different countries. I also got a fellowship of three months with NELGA. My professional life has changed a lot because I am growing with the network.”*

*– Good Practice Survey, 2025.*

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## Effective Approach 6: Evidence-based Monitoring and Reflexive Improvement

PLAAS embedded a strong **monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)** culture into every stage of its NELGA engagement. Rather than treating evaluation as an external audit requirement, PLAAS used it as a reflexive learning process that continuously informed course design, participant selection, and content updates. This approach ensured that each iteration of the short course and masterclasses responded directly to emerging needs and contextual shifts across Africa's land-governance landscape.

### The MEL system integrates

1. participant feedback surveys,
2. longitudinal tracer studies,
3. qualitative interviews and focus groups, and
4. annual partner reflections with GIZ and ALPC.

Data are not only collected but also analysed collaboratively and used to adapt the curriculum, pedagogy, and facilitation modalities. This reflexive process also enabled PLAAS to introduce then

ew module on climate–land linkages, keeping the curriculum aligned with emerging policy agendas on climate change, carbon finance, and land–energy transitions.

PLAAS's participatory monitoring system has generated continual improvement across course iterations. Since 2018, two independent evaluations, one needs assessment, and a 2024 tracer study have informed curriculum updates, leading to higher satisfaction scores, rising from 4.3/5 in 2018 to 4.7/5 in 2025. Alumni beneficiary confirmed that their feedback directly shaped new modules:

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*“The revised sessions in 2023 addressed exactly the policy dilemmas we raised during our focus group,”*

*– reported a civil-society alumnus (2023).*

”



## 4. Scaling up and Replication

The PLAAS–NELGA model offers clear opportunities for replication across Africa’s higher-education and policy-training ecosystems. Its success rests on strong institutional partnerships, Africa-centred pedagogy, gender-mainstreamed content, and a blended delivery approach that proved both resilient and scalable – maintaining quality while expanding access to participants from over 40 countries. The model aligns with AU Agenda 2063 and advances the AU Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa by embedding African-owned knowledge production, critical analysis, and evidence-based adaptation through a participatory monitoring system.

### Conditions for replication include:

- institutional buy-in to embed accredited courses;
- alignment with AU and VGGT standards;
- blended-learning infrastructure;
- seed funding for convening and multilingual facilitation and capacity for bilingual (English–French) delivery to strengthen regional inclusivity.

Its **sustainability** is reinforced through continued UWC’s institutionalisation of the programme, long-term partnerships rather than project cycles, and ongoing alumni engagement that supports behavioural change, mentorship, and a continent-wide community of practice.

**Open curriculum** sharing has already enabled some replication in Tanzania, Ghana, and Namibia, demonstrating the model’s adaptability. By leveraging existing NELGA networks and regional collaborations, the PLAAS model can evolve into a modular, Africa-led training system that strengthens policy influence and supports the AU’s commitment to continental expertise in land governance.

## 5. Building on Success: Priorities for the Future

### Lessons Learned

Over **seven years** (2018–2025), PLAAS has demonstrated that African-led, context-grounded training enables deeper conceptual understanding and behavioural change than externally driven technical approaches. This was strengthened by embedding gender analysis across all modules, adopting blended delivery, and anchoring the programme in long-term partnerships, alumni engagement, and continuous monitoring.

At the same time, several **implementation challenges** shaped how these lessons should inform future planning. Some participants required more preparation to engage with dense theoretical content; persistent gender gaps in senior policy spaces slowed institutional uptake of gender-sensitive approaches; and digital connectivity, data costs, and uneven digital literacy limited the benefits of online learning for certain regions.

**Coordination** across institutional partners occasionally reduced programme agility, alumni engagement varied without periodic support, and longitudinal monitoring required sustained resources. Sustainability also depends on reducing reliance on donor funding, while future expansion will require institutional buy-in and seed funding for coordination, multilingual delivery, and facilitation. These insights collectively underline the need to balance ambition with practical resourcing as PLAAS scales its Africa-centred model.



## Priorities for the Future



**Institutionalisation:** Use UWC's existing CEP procedures – approval, budgeting, annual scheduling, and marketing – to complete the embedment of the *Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa and Climate Change and Land Governance* courses, drawing on the processes PLAAS has already used for previous CEP offerings.



**Financial Diversification:** Introduce modest tuition or registration fees and negotiate blended funding with AU, UNECA, and national governments, building on PLAAS's past mixed-funding models of donor support with institutional co-funding to cover core coordination and alumni-network costs.



**Policy Integration:** Continue to systematically channel course outputs (policy briefs, case studies, and alumni research) directly into AU–ALPC and alumni policy dialogues to support the evidence-based land reform process.



**Language and Regional Expansion:** Scale and co-deliver Francophone and Arabic course versions using joint curriculum adaptation workshops, regional co-facilitators, and locally relevant case studies through partnerships with West, North, and Central African universities, drawing on PLAAS's experiences of training partnerships with NELGA Nodes in Ghana and Tanzania.



**Ongoing Learning and Evaluation:** Maintain PLAAS's reflexive monitoring system, including alumni feedback, periodic tracer studies, to adapt content to evolving continental challenges such as climate change and resource conflicts.



**Alumni Network and Continuous Learning:** Strengthen alumni engagement by formalising PLAAS's existing digital practices (WhatsApp groups, Google Groups, webinars, Zoom masterclasses) into a yearly programme of peer mentoring, resource sharing, and optional summer schools on land governance.





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