

Land Rights and Wrongs



This activity explores WWGS Guiding Principle 3: Prioritising Human Rights. It unpacks human rights issues around land appropriation, using case studies from eight Indigenous communities around the world.

This is a class activity done in groups. It takes 1.5 - 2 hours to complete all the steps, however it can be broken up into 2 separate sessions where necessary.

Case studies 1-5 are taken from **The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)**, which reports on the situation of Indigenous Peoples worldwide. See their page: '[Five Alarming Land Grabbing Cases](#)'. Case studies 6-8 are taken from [The New Internationalist Climate Capitalism](#) issue, Jan-Feb 2024.



Teacher Preparation for the Class Activity

Print out some, or all, of the eight case studies below.

Class Activity

1. Divide the class into groups and give each group one of the case studies.
2. Within each group (each case study), learners take the following roles:
 - Role 1:** The group taking the land
 - Role 2:** The Indigenous group from whom the land is taken
 - Role 3:** The mediator(s) who will facilitate the discussion between the two sidesThese roles are specified in each case study, see below.
15 min
3. Once the 3 roles are allocated within each case study group (i.e. those taking the land, the Indigenous people and the mediators), they work out the points they will make.
20 min
4. Each side has three minutes to present their case. At the end, the mediator summarises each side's points as accurately as possible.
10 min
5. The case study group then discusses and comes to a solution/compromise.
20 min
6. Bring the whole class together. Each case study group then has approximately 6 minutes to present their case to the whole class.
 - Role 1:** The group taking the land present their points (*2 min*)
 - Role 2:** The Indigenous group from whom the land is taken present their points (*2 min*)
 - Role 3:** The mediator(s) presents the solution or compromise the two sides agreed to (*2 min*)

7. After every group has presented, there can be a walking debate, or general class discussion, of human rights issues around land appropriation. See the [WWGS Activities Resource](#) for step-by-step instructions on carrying out a walking debate.

Suggested statements for walking debate:

1. Human rights are more important than animal rights.
(Agree or disagree, why/why not?)
2. When human rights conflict with environmental concerns, which should win out?
3. When ecotourism benefits the majority of people in a country economically, it justifies taking the land of Indigenous minorities.
15-20 min

Case Studies

Case Studies 1-5: adapted from [IWGIA Five Alarming Land Grabbing Cases](#).

Case Studies 6-8: adapted from the [New Internationalist magazine Climate Capitalism 2024](#)

1. Infrastructure project across indigenous land

In Kenya, a huge project is underway to build a transport corridor (ports, pipelines, roads and railways) between its eastern coast, right across Africa to the west African country of Cameroon. But the US\$25.5 billion Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Project cuts across Indigenous peoples' land. The project, funded partly by the European Union, threatens the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, hunter-gatherers and fishing communities. They have consistently raised concerns about the project, which is taking place without due regard for land or resource rights.

Role 1: Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Project (land takers).

Role 2: Indigenous groups (people whose livelihoods are threatened).

Role 3: Mediator(s) (those hearing each side and facilitating a solution).

Questions to consider

Role 1: LAPSSET

- What are the reasons for taking the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: Small farmers, hunter-gatherers, fishers and pastoralists

- What are your reasons against taking the land?
- How will you be impacted? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- What do you want from LAPSSET? What do you now need and want from the international community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

2. National parks triggering forced evictions

Land grabbing and land conflicts in Tanzania are linked to the expansion of national parks. The Maasai have been violently removed from their land several times since 1959, when the British colonial government established the Serengeti National Park. In 2016, 5,500 acres were taken by the Tanzania National Parks Authority. The Maasai depended on this land for their livestock and survival. In 2017 Maasai people were also forced off land in northern Tanzania. These attempted evictions, carried out in the name of “wildlife conservation”, gained international attention when the Ngorongoro District Commissioner issued an order to evict legally registered village lands around the Serengeti National Park. Maasai houses were burnt to the ground and most of their property destroyed, leaving families without shelter, food or water.

Role 1: Tanzania National Parks Authority (land takers).

Role 2: Maasai people (those who’ve been forced off their land).

Role 3: Mediator(s) (those hearing each side and facilitating a solution).

Questions to consider

Role 1: Tanzania National Parks Authority

- How do you justify taking the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: Maasai

- What’s been the personal impact of losing your land (personal stories are powerful)?
- What about your legal rights?
- Your houses have gone, your survival is threatened - what do you now need and want from the Tanzania National Parks Authority? What do you now need and want from the international community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

3. Agricultural investment without consultations

In Ethiopia, the government is leasing vast areas of fertile land to foreign and domestic companies. This affects Indigenous people in the Ethiopian lowlands. To increase agricultural investment, Indigenous land is unfairly labelled by the government as “underutilised” and taken for lease, depriving about 15 million Indigenous people - small-scale farmers, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists - of their livelihoods, and violating their customary (traditional) land rights.

Role 1: Ethiopian government (land takers).

Role 2: Indigenous pastoralists, farmers and hunter-gatherers (those forced off their land).

Role 3: Mediator(s) (those hearing each side and facilitating a solution).

Questions to consider

Role 1: Ethiopian government

- How do you justify taking the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: Pastoralists, small-scale farmers and hunter-gatherers

- What's been the impact of losing your land? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- What do you now need and want from the Ethiopian government? What do you now need and want from the international community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

4. The danger of mining

In 2017, Mexico ranked as the fourth most dangerous country for activists to defend land rights. This fact is directly linked to the 29,000 mining, hydroelectric and wind power concessions (permits to private multinational companies) currently active in the country. These operations cover more than 35% of Mexico's land, and half of them run on Indigenous land.

Role 1: Mining, hydroelectric and wind power companies (land takers)

Role 2: Indigenous groups (those forced off their land).

Role 3: Mediator(s) (those hearing each side and facilitating a solution).

Questions to consider

Role 1: Mining, hydroelectric and wind power companies

- How do you justify taking the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: Indigenous groups

- What's been the impact of losing your land? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- What dangers have you faced in your activism and protests?
- What do you now need and want from the companies? What do you now need and want from the international community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

5. Hydropower affecting Indigenous communities

In Cambodia, the largest hydropower dam was almost completed in 2017, despite total opposition from Indigenous communities. In December 2017, the government announced that more than 30,000 hectares around the dam would also be converted into economic land concessions. Large-scale investment continues to expand in Laos, especially due to a dam-building spree, including 72 new large dams. These hydropower development plans involve the forced removal of Indigenous peoples, with 100 families reported as victims in 2017.

Role 1: The Cambodian government selling land to companies (land takers).

Role 2: Indigenous peoples (those forced off their land).

Role 3: Mediator(s) (those hearing each side and facilitating a solution).

Questions to consider

Role 1: Cambodian government

- How do you justify taking the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: Indigenous communities

- What's been - and will be - the impact of losing your land? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- How have your human rights been violated?
- What do you now need and want from the Cambodian government? What do you now need and want from the international community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

6. Sustainable cities in Gaza

In January 2024, there was a sustainability conference in Israel to plan new sustainable cities in Gaza once it was completely destroyed. Technologically, Israel is ahead of the game as regards environmental sustainability solutions. However, these sustainable cities are planned on the land from which the Israeli government and army have driven the Palestinian people. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in Gaza since October 2023 and nearly 2 million (90% of the population) displaced. Many Palestinians have fled, seeking refuge in Lebanon, Jordan and other countries in the Middle East.

Role 1: The Israeli government.

Role 2: The Palestinian people.

Role 3: The mediator.

Questions to consider

Role 1: The Israeli government

- How do you justify taking the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: The Palestinian people

- What's been - and will be - the impact of losing your land? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- How have your human rights been violated?
- What do you now need and want from the Israeli government? What do you now need and want from the international community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

7. The Ouarzazate Solar Power Station in Morocco is one of the world's largest solar power projects. (Abridged from the [New Internationalist](#))

Ouarzazate is a beautiful town in south central Morocco, home to the major film sets of Atlas Studios. Parts of Lawrence of Arabia, Gladiator and Game of Thrones were filmed here.

Just six miles away from the town is one of the biggest solar projects in the world, the Ouarzazate Solar Power Station. It aims to end Morocco's dependency on energy imports and put the country on a 'green path' that will meet 52 percent of the country's energy needs from renewable sources by 2030.

But the Saudi-built and run plant has failed to benefit the impoverished communities that surround it; the Amazigh pastoralists were paid a pittance for the lands used for the 3,000-hectare facility and were not informed of the impact the project would have on scarce water resources. The Ouarzazate plant uses concentrated solar-thermal power (CSP) technology – which uses arrays of mirrors to heat a liquid to high temperatures and drive a turbine – which is water intensive, diverting the vital resource away from drinking and agriculture in an area that is already semi-arid.

Role 1: The Moroccan government.

Role 2: The Amazigh farmers.

Role 3: The mediator.

Questions to consider

Role 1: The Moroccan government

- How do you justify using the land?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?

Role 2: The Amazigh farmers

- What's been - and will be - the impact of losing your land? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- How have your human rights been violated?
- What do you now need and want from the government? What do you now need and want from the International community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

8. Tunisia

In 2017, the Tunisian-British company TuNur applied to build a 4.5 gigawatt solar plant in the Tunisian desert in order, it claimed, to deliver enough electricity via submarine cables to power two million European homes. This still unreal zed project is a partnership between UK-based Noor Energy and a group of Maltese and Tunisian investors in the oil and gas sector.

The plans have been given a boost by a new project seeking to establish a 600-megawatt undersea cable linking Tunisian and Italian/EU power grids, ELMED. This project is funded by the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, German state-owned bank KfW, and the World Bank. Given that Tunisia already depends on Algerian imports of gas it is outrageous that such projects are geared squarely towards exporting power to Europe, rather than producing energy for domestic use.

The local people such as those in the village of Borj Salhi local communities' participation and rights, as well as environmental sustainability, are not guaranteed in the face of corporate foreign interests. The impacts on the social and environmental rights of local communities should be closely monitored, both on paper and in practice, in future projects but they are not.

Role 1: The European Union.

Role 2: The people of Borj Salhi.

Role 3: The mediator.

Questions to consider

Role 1: The European Union

- How do you justify using land outside Europe for energy needs for Europe?
- Who will benefit and how (e.g. economically, socially environmentally)?
- How will the local people benefit?

Role 2: The people of Borj Salhi

- What's been - and will be - the impact of your land being used? Can you present any personal stories (they are always powerful)?
- How have your human rights been violated?
- What do you now need and want from the government? What do you now need and want from the International community-the Irish government?

Role 3: The mediator helps each side come up with brief points to make their case.

Please note: *There is an emphasis on producing power to meet the energy needs of the Global North, while conversely, rich countries can export the harms of energy generation to poorer regions. For example, while certain Western governments portray themselves as pro-environment by banning fracking within their borders and by setting carbon emissions-reduction targets, they Climate capitalism simultaneously offer diplomatic support to their multinationals to exploit shale resources in their former colonies, as France did with Total in Algeria in 2013: a clear example of environmental racism.*

Export-oriented projects are geared towards safeguarding EU energy security, as shown by Italian ENI's new deal with Algeria's Sonatrach for an additional 9 billion cubic metres of gas from 2023/24 to replace imports from Russia. Securing EU energy supplies also extends to the renewable sector, with planned interconnectors and green hydrogen projects in North Africa.

Source: Climate Capitalism New Internationalist January/February 2024 THE EL DORADO OF ENERGY Hamza Hamouchene.