

Methodology

Introduction

Land Conflict Watch (LCW) has developed peer-reviewed protocols, standards and methodology for data collection, research and analysis. These were fine-tuned with the help of researchers, academics and institutions.

LCW collects data on 84 different parameters for every land conflict it maps. The parameters include information on the number of people impacted, investments associated with the land conflict, the type of economic activity undertaken on the land and area under conflict. The mapping exercise also captures information on the tenure systems associated with the land under conflict and other location-specific characteristics. LCW gathers and maintains requisite evidence to support the data; this includes official, administrative and legal records pertaining to the conflict. This information is supplemented by interviews carried out by LCW's field researchers, who source additional information from the affected parties.

The LCW team consists of field researchers, coordinators, reviewers and data analysts. Each of them has clearly defined roles in the process of conflict identification, data collection, verification and analysis.

Definitions

The research uses specific terminology and definitions oriented towards field research and the subsequent analysis of land conflicts.

Land conflict: A land conflict is defined as any instance in which the use of, access to, and/or control over land and its associated resources are contested by two or more parties. Land conflicts between two private parties are excluded unless the particular conflict has a larger underlying public interest. The LCW database records only those conflicts for which textual and/or audio-visual verification is viable.

Affected area: The land area in hectares (ha) which is under contestation.

Affected population: For private land, those who hold or claim legal and rightful tenure over the conflict-affected land, or depend on it for their livelihood, are considered affected. For common land, people who have a stake in the contested land parcel and the attendant services it provides are considered the affected population.

Investments: Investment data are based on evidence available in the public domain, as cited by project developers or authoritative government records. Data include the proposed investments locked in the project inducing conflict or actual investments made in a project at the time of recording the conflict and, in some cases, projected investment figures announced by authorities or project developers. LCW tends to take a conservative approach in tagging capital investments to conflicts. Capital costs are recorded at the time of documenting the research and are updated if they are subsequently reassessed by project proponents or authorities. Capital costs are not adjusted according to current price levels.

Household: For all calculations, a “household” comprises an average of 4.8 individuals, as per Census 2011 data.

Areas with Left-wing extremism: Areas impacted by LWE are classified as such by the Government of India. In its February 2019 assessment, the Union government identified 90 districts in the country as impacted by LWE.

Scheduled Areas: The Indian Constitution enshrines a special legal and administrative framework for the land rights of Scheduled Tribes in geographically demarcated areas known as “Scheduled Areas”. These areas are spread across 10 peninsular and four Northeastern states. Areas within the Northeast are demarcated under the Sixth Schedule and those in peninsular India are demarcated under the Fifth Schedule.

Conflict Identification

LCW has a team of over 30 contributing researchers – spread across the country– working to identify and report land conflicts. LCW has two or more researchers in several large states to cover the region. However, some states and regions are under-reported either due to difficult terrain or the periodic absence of affiliated researchers. LCW’s researchers include academics, lawyers and research scholars, all of whom either come from or have specialised professional experience in their respective geographic areas.

Data sources: Researchers based in different states draw upon local and regional sources to identify potential conflict leads, follow them up and verify and report them to the core team based in New Delhi. They collect information from a mix of primary and secondary sources. Correspondents are encouraged to verify details about the conflicts by collecting evidence from multiple sources:

Regional and local news sources: Researchers monitor at least three local and regional newspapers for initial registrations of potential land conflicts. These necessarily include newspapers published in regional languages.

Google Alerts: Google Alerts is a useful tool for identifying potential conflicts. Alerts can be used to track specific issues, industries and districts in national and regional news reports.

Official documents: Official documentation available on public record is used to ascertain details, whenever viable. Such documentation can include, but is not restricted to, environmental impact assessments (EIAs), affidavits, court case transcripts, government documents, police reports, petitions, village assembly resolutions and any other official documentation that confirms the presence of a conflict.

Primary sources: First-hand accounts, videos, audio recordings and photographs often form part of the evidence gathered regarding a case. Researchers are encouraged to build networks with locals, grassroots organisations, activist groups, peasant movement leaders, government officials, industry leaders and NGOs that are active in their region of focus.

Data Collection, Verification and Analysis

Documentation: LCW equips all researchers with a research manual, which gives them the necessary context and instructions. Researchers are provided access to LCW's online database platform, Airtable. To file a conflict, researchers fill an online form, with quantitative and qualitative questions, which automatically organises the data on Airtable and prepares it to be exported for analysis.

Verification: In the review phase, the reviewers' team verifies and cross-references all the data and citations that the researcher provides and edits the case summaries. After verification, the conflict is published on Airtable, which automatically uploads it on LCW's website.

Preliminary data analysis: Following data collection and verification, a team of data analysts conducts a simple preliminary statistical analysis by forming comparison groups and summarising, grouping and visualising the data.

Updating conflicts: As land conflicts are constantly evolving, the reviewers' team periodically reviews and updates LCW's records. The team reviews the provided sources, conducts online searches for the latest information and makes phone calls to the resource persons and the representatives of the parties involved.

Data sharing: Data on each conflict are made available to the public on an open platform. Personal data about the people and communities involved in the conflicts are kept confidential. Aggregate data on basic trends across geographical regions, industrial sectors and land types can also be analysed through the interactive data explorer. Interested parties can request access to the LCW database or segments of it for further research.

Caveats and Limitations

LCW has faced certain constraints during data collection. Coverage in Scheduled Areas and those affected by civil unrest, LWE and inter-ethnic conflicts has been relatively limited. Many of these factors are red flags for the presence of potential land conflicts. However, these factors also make accessing information difficult. India's Northeastern region still has the potential for better coverage by LCW.

When available, data for the fields of "affected population", "area", and "investments" are retrieved from official reports and independent studies. LCW relies on media reports and other secondary sources – often more conservative ones – when primary sources are unavailable. When data differ across sources, LCW relies on government sources.