Land property rights interventions improve agricultural productivity and investment in Latin America and Asia, but less in Africa.

What is the aim of this review?
This Campbell Systematic Review examines the effect of interventions to strengthen land property rights on outcomes such as investment, agricultural productivity and farmer incomes in rural areas in low and middle-income countries. The review summarises evidence from 20 quantitative studies (quasi-experimental studies with statistical adjustment for bias) and nine qualitative studies.

What studies are included?
The review includes 20 quantitative studies with quasi-experimental study designs with statistical adjustment for bias, and nine qualitative studies. The studies were conducted in Latin America, South Asia, East Asia and Africa, and each compared households or land parcels where the interventions did and did not occur. The time between intervention and assessment ranged from two years to 44 years.

No studies of sufficient quality were found on another kind of land property right intervention: statutory recognition of customary land rights at a legal status equal to state and private.
What are the main findings of this review?

What are the effects of agricultural and livelihood outcomes of land property rights interventions?

Land property rights improve productivity, consumption expenditure and income. However, caution is needed in interpreting this finding as there are few high-quality studies available.

Where are land property rights interventions effective?

Land property rights interventions have significant effects in Latin America and Asia. In Africa, the effects are positive, but much weaker. Landholders in Africa may have sufficient security from customary tenure arrangements and therefore have less need for formalization. They may also have less ability to invest in their farms after gaining land rights, due to lower incomes. And tenure reforms may not be coupled adequately with investments in training, roads, or other forms of “public capital.”

What are the other outcomes of land property rights interventions?

Qualitative studies show that social outcomes such as displacement, conflict or gender equality are unpredictable and sometimes negative, such as displacing the poor and reducing women’s access to land.

How has this intervention worked?

The studies suggest that land property rights interventions contribute to welfare through improved perceived security and resulting long-term investment. No studies showed that land property rights interventions improve access to credit.

What do the findings of this review mean?

Land property rights interventions are promising in terms of economic outcomes but the context should be considered carefully, because benefits may not outweigh negative social consequences, especially in areas with strong existing customary land rights. More research is needed on social outcomes.