PLAAS is a donor-funded, university-based research institute at the University of the Western Cape, in Cape Town, South Africa.

We undertake use-oriented basic research on the political economy of hunger, poverty, inequality and vulnerable livelihoods in African agro-food systems. We seek to understand the causes of landlessness and poverty and explore the underlying dynamics of political and economic structures and power relations.

Within this agenda we pursue specialised research projects relating to the politics of land deals and ‘land grabs’ in sub-Saharan Africa, the challenges of supporting smallholder agriculture and other forms of livelihood, the dynamics of informal self-employment, and the survival strategies of the rural and urban poor. We also explore the political dynamics of water and irrigation reform, and the social and political dynamics of ecosystem and natural resource management.

While we maintain high standards of academic rigour and scholarly excellence, our research is always practically oriented, concerned with interrogating and exploring policy responses to the challenges of agrarian change in Africa.

Teaching is another core part of our mission. Our postgraduate diploma is directed at professionals working in agriculture, land and rural development policy. We also offer a MPhil and a PhD by research, which aim to equip prospective researchers with the conceptual, empirical, theoretical and methodological tools they need to work in the field and undertake high-quality research.
RESEARCH

Our research covers diverse areas, ranging from land and tenure reform, land investment and agro-food restructuring, fisheries and ecosystem management, to social protection and informal self-employment.

In all this work our key focus is on the causes and dynamics of inequality and structural poverty, on the economic and social agency of poor and marginalised people, and on the implications of these insights for inclusive growth and pro-poor policies.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

PLAAS researchers engage with policy processes, sometimes working closely with government departments as advisors, as consultants in programme design or project facilitation, as reviewers or evaluators, or as policy workshop facilitators. Researchers comment on policies in popular media and academic papers, participate in public debates, and make presentations at policy-oriented workshops and conferences.

In recent years, PLAAS staff members have been active in civil society alliances in the land reform sector, and have contributed to supporting NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) in engaging with key policy issues and processes of change.

RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

Making research accessible is an essential component of use-oriented basic research. PLAAS produces a wide range of publications (books, research reports, policy briefs, working papers, newsletters and a Fact Check series), but also various internet platforms aimed at reaching a wider audience.

Our website – www.plaas.org.za – is regularly updated with new publications, upcoming events and news; the website then feeds into a social networking strategy encompassing Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube.

In addition, PLAAS organises conferences, symposia, seminars and workshops to disseminate research findings, contribute to public debate, and generate discussion about policy and practice in the sectors in which we work.

LIBRARY SERVICE

PLAAS has a useful collection of material ranging from books and journals to audio-visual and grey literature covering the organisation’s research focus areas. The material is available in the Resource Centre.

The in-house librarian is available to assist with searches and queries:
email: librarian@plaas.org.za
or phone: +27 (0)21 959 3719.

The library catalogue is also accessible through the PLAAS website.

LIBRARY SERVICE

PLAAS maintains close working relationships with a wide range of organisations, including other academic departments and institutions, development agencies, and NGOs. Many of these links are regional, continental and global in scope. Partnerships take the form of joint research projects, strengthening networks with research information, collaborative teaching and training programmes, staff exchanges and providing facilities and support for visiting scholars.

In the land sector we are partner members of the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI), the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC), and the BRICS Initiative on Critical Agrarian Studies (BICAS). In the fisheries sector we are a partner in the Too Big to Ignore network, which focuses on small-scale fisheries, and the Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Livelihoods in Small-scale Fisheries (POVFISH) network. We work with the Southern African Food Lab around food systems and smallholder farmers, and with the Water Research Commission on water issues.

POSTGRADUATE TEACHING

The Postgraduate Teaching Programme offers four unique programmes that are internationally recognised in the research areas of poverty, inequality and vulnerability; land, fisheries and water and natural resource rights; farming, agro-food systems and agrarian reform; and the social dimensions of fisheries and ecosystem management.

Postgraduate Diploma in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

This diploma is aimed at professionals working in government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector in land and agrarian reform, rural development, natural resources, and gender, who seek to progress in their careers and improve their knowledge and skills in these sectors. It comprises a six-week block teaching programme of which all modules and attendance are compulsory.

MPhil (Research) in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

This degree involves the completion of a full Master’s thesis on an appropriate topic under the supervision of a PLAAS researcher.

PhD

This degree involves completing a full Doctoral thesis under the supervision of a senior PLAAS researcher.

POSTGRADUATE TEACHING

PLAAS is also home to the Department of Science and Technology’s National Research Foundation (DST/NRF) Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies. Our current research areas are:

- Poverty, Inequality and Vulnerability
- Land, Water and Resource Rights
- Social Dimensions of Fisheries and Ecosystem Management
- Farming, Agro-food Systems and Agrarian Reform
- Inclusive Growth and Pro-poor Policies
- Political Economy and Resource Rights
- Land, Water and Natural Resource Rights
- Agrarian Reform
- Food Security and Poverty Reduction
- Smallholder Agriculture
- Urban Agriculture
- Aquaculture
- Fisheries
- Ecosystem Services
- Natural Resource Management
- Commons Management
- Resilience within Water-Linked Ecosystems
- Ecosystem Services for Development and Poverty Reduction
- Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)
- Private Sector
- Government
- Policy Research
- Practice