

Land Tenure in the Context of Sustainable Rural Development: the Work of the Land Tenure Service of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations in Southern Africa

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1. WHAT IS FAO?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was founded in 1945 with a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations.

Today, FAO is one of the largest specialized agencies in the United Nations system and the lead agency for agriculture, forestry, fisheries and rural development. An intergovernmental organization, FAO has 180 member countries plus one member organization, the European Community.

Since its inception, FAO has worked to alleviate poverty and hunger by promoting agricultural development, improved nutrition and the pursuit of food security - defined as the access of all people at all times to the food they need for an active and healthy life.

A specific priority of the Organization is encouraging sustainable agriculture and rural development, a long-term strategy for increasing food production and food security while conserving and managing natural resources. The aim is to meet the needs of both present and future generations by promoting development that does not degrade the environment and is technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable.

2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND LAND TENURE

The important linkages between sustainable development and land tenure have been repeatedly emphasised by the Summits and other international meetings of the last decade.

The United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, the "Rio Summit" included among its conclusions Chapter 14 dealing with Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) as follows:

The main tools of Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development are policy and agrarian reform, participation, income diversification, land conservation and improved management of inputs (Chapter 14, Agenda 21)

Access to resources and issues relating to land tenure are also a significant part of other chapters in Agenda 21, including particularly chapter 10 (Integrated Approach to the Planning and Management of Land Resources).

The World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 pointed out in its Plan of Action that the “vast majority of those who are undernourished . . . have inadequate access to means of production such as land . . .”

CSD 8 (the 8th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development) in 2000 identified access to land and security of tenure as one its recommended areas for priority work. The World Summit on Sustainable Development on Agenda 21 in Johannesburg in 2002 reflected concerns about land tenure related issues.

The Land Tenure Service is one of the constituent services of FAO’s Rural Development Division, part of the Sustainable Development Department. The Rural Development Division, through its Rural Institutions and Participation Service, is the designated task manager for Chapter 14 of Agenda 21.

Adequate institutional arrangements are required to determine rights and access to rural resources, such as land, water, trees, and wildlife, as a prerequisite to agricultural development and food security. Many countries specifically require advice on such institutional arrangements for property rights, on how to ensure more equitable access by women and men to natural resources, on functioning land markets and land administration to take account of mortgage-secured credit for investment and good governance of land and natural resources.

The Sustainable Development Department of FAO assists Member Nations in restructuring their rural institutions and in the identification and preparation of projects on land tenure institution building for food security and sustainable rural development. Support has been provided in developing and adopting policies, programmes, best practices and tools for land tenure to facilitate access to land, ensure user rights and improve land markets.

Assistance is provided by the Land Tenure Service, frequently in collaboration with other technical services of the Organization, in four major areas:

- formulation of methodologies for government-assisted land tenure policies to improve access to land by disadvantaged groups, especially women;
- formulation of market and private land transaction policies and institutional support to improve access by the poor for sustainable use of natural resources;
- modifications of land tenure systems to promote rural development under indigenous and common property resource management;
- land tenure regularization and land administration services.

Assistance is provided to establish policy guidelines and legislative mechanisms for conflict resolution so as to improve access to land, using various land reform approaches in a manner that is gender-responsive and environmentally sustainable. The development of women is supported through research and analysis and by identifying constraints faced by rural women under customary land tenure, especially in relation to land rights, accumulation and control of land-based productive resources.

3. HOW DOES THE LAND TENURE SERVICE UNDERTAKE ITS WORK?

The Organization is pursuing a policy of decentralisation, and so the capacities of the technical services are now increasingly spread between headquarters and the decentralised offices. With a total of more than 3,700 staff members – 1,400 professional and 2,300 general service staff – the Organization maintains five regional offices, five sub-regional offices, five liaison offices and over 78 country offices, in addition to its headquarters in Rome.

The Land Tenure Service comprises a small multidisciplinary team of professional officers based partly at the Organization's headquarters in Rome, and partly in the decentralised regional and sub-regional offices. The Service has officers in post currently in Santiago, Chile covering the Latin America/Caribbean region; in Harare, covering the Southern and Eastern Africa sub-region; in Accra, Ghana covering the Africa region generally, and in Budapest, Hungary covering the Central and Eastern Europe sub-region. The Service will be recruiting an officer to deal with rural development and land tenure issues based in Cairo, Egypt, to cover the Near East region.

The work of the Land Tenure Service comprises partly an ongoing programme of planned research and development activities. These are known broadly as the "normative programme" activities and are distinguished from the project-based work, known as the "field programme".

3.1 The normative programme

"Normative programme" activities are developed in accordance with the Strategic and Medium Term Plans of the Organization. These operate on time-frames respectively of 15 years (2000-15) and six years (2002-07).

Detailed planning and budgeting of specific activities is undertaken on a biennial basis. The budgets for these activities include elements related to field support for the member nations, and to research and development activities. The former provides capacity to respond to requests from member nations for support in specific technical areas. The latter is ongoing work aimed at improving the capacities of member nations in addressing the many important issues in this field.

Outputs of the normative programme are monitored and evaluated from a quality assurance standpoint.

3.2 The field programme

In addition to its normative programme work, the Land Tenure Service is responsible for several specific projects where it is the "lead technical unit". This field programme or project-based work may be financed internally, through programme funds set aside for member nation project support under the Organization's Technical Co-operation Department. These Technical Co-operation Projects (TCPs) are of limited size (maximum \$400,000; average \$200-220,000) and duration – preferably of one to three months' duration, although often exceeding this.

External finance is also an important source of resources for projects. Where we are responsible for management of these, they will be set up under a trust fund arrangement, whether the finance is provided by a third party, often a bilateral donor, or by the member nation itself.

4. LAND TENURE SERVICE INITIATIVES AND INVOLVEMENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Land Tenure Service is actively involved in both normative and field programme activities in Southern Africa.

4.1 The normative programme

The Land Tenure Service's normative programme activities planned for the 2002-03 biennium will generate the following specific outputs relating to Southern Africa:

- § **Guidelines for government assisted agrarian reform policies.** This includes activities such as our support for the current FIG symposium on Land Redistribution in Southern Africa. Other activities and outputs have included research and publication of guidelines relating to "Land Tenure and Rural Development" and "Gender and Access to Land". Research has also been undertaken in the countries of the region in relation to gender and access to land and the impact of HIV/AIDS on access to land.
- § **Methodological guidelines on education, and training strategies and materials for strengthening human capital needed for improved land tenure policies and land administration.** Considerable effort and resources have been invested in background studies, including in relation to Southern Africa. Research reports have been commissioned, submitted and discussed in workshops, including in relation to Southern Africa. These will form the basis of guidelines that will be developed during the course of 2003.
- § **Guidelines for the transfer of land administration capacities and responsibilities from central government agencies to local government instances for the provision of improved rural development services.** (Based on comparative experiences in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America.)
- § **Resource kit and training material for participatory diagnostics of common property resources in African Lusophone countries.** The Service, with other units of FAO, has a strong tradition of supporting the Organization's member countries in Lusophone Africa on land policy related issues and is currently operating with projects in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau.
- § **Guidelines for negotiated land conflict management** (Based on comparative analysis of case studies of countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia and Pacific.)
- § **Guidelines for regularising land tenure in peri-urban/peri-rural zones.** (Based on comparative analysis of experience in Africa, Asia and Central and Eastern Europe)

§ Methodological guidelines and training material for participatory territorial planning. (Based on comparative analysis of case studies in Latin America, Asia, and Africa)

In addition to these core-funded and programmed outputs, the Service also works on other related outputs with bilateral and other external funding, and in conjunction with other agencies and organizations. These include other UN agencies, such as for example UN-Habitat, the World Food Programme and the UN's regional commissions; the international financial organizations, including the World Bank, regional development and other banks; and increasingly, the NGO and private sectors.

4.2 The field programme

The Land Tenure Service's field programme spans all of the developing and transitional regions, often in co-operation with other parts of the Organization to ensure the appropriate multi-disciplinary mix of skills are provided. The Service is active in all of FAO's regions. In the Southern and Eastern Africa sub-region, to cite just one example, it has had a long association with developing and supporting the implementation of land tenure related policies, including in Yanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Specific countries where the Service is committed range from current discussions in Zimbabwe on land related information, and from emergency assistance in Angola identifying community boundaries, through to long standing work in Mozambique with the Land Commission.

5. THE FUTURE

The expectation in the coming years is that demand will continue to increase for land tenure related services. This is partly a function of the Organization investing, through its decentralisation policy, in greater capacity "on the ground" with a new officer recently appointed in the regional office in Accra, and one to be appointed shortly to deal with the Near East region, based in Cairo. It is also partly a function of many other factors ranging from increasing demand for effective access to land, to recognition of the importance of gender issues in land tenure, and concerns for the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on land tenure institutions and land administration capacity.

REFERENCES

The material for this paper has been generally assembled from the web-sites of FAO and other UN organisations: see www.fao.org for access.