

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

Dr. Paul MUNRO-FAURE, FAO

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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the broad aims and objectives of the Food and Agriculture Organization in the context of the challenges for sustainable development. It identifies the Organization's structure and the mechanisms by which the Organization addresses these areas under its programme of research and field activities. Specific attention is paid to issues relating to land tenure in this context and the role of the Organization's Land Tenure Service.

Looking to the future the paper addresses how FAO's programmes and activities are developing in response to the demands of the Organization's member nations.

CONTACT

Paul Munro-Faure
Land Tenure Service
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00100 Rome
ITALY
Tel. + 39 06 5705 6883
Fax + 39 06 5705 3250
E-mail: paul.munrofaure@fao.org
Web site: <http://www.fao.org>

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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.

Food production has increased at an unprecedented rate since FAO was founded in 1945, outpacing the doubling of the world's population over the same period. Since the early 1960s, the proportion of hungry people in the developing world has been reduced from more than 50 percent to less than 20 percent. Despite these gains, however, more than 790 million people in the developing world - more than the total population of North America and Western Europe combined - still go hungry.

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.

The supreme governing body of FAO is the Conference. This comprises of all 181 FAO members (at noted above, 180 states and one member organization, the European Community), and meets in regular session every two years. The main functions of the Conference are to determine the policies of the Organization, approve the budget, and make recommendations to members and international organizations on any matter pertaining to the purposes of FAO. The executive organ of the Conference, comprising 49 member nations, is the Council.

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 . . ."

These views have been repeatedly endorsed and developed by civil society since then with strong emphasis paid to supporting those most vulnerable and to more integrated and holistic approaches. FIG, of course, has been an active participant in this development contributing a large number of publications:

- Sustainable Development: a Challenge and a Responsibility for Surveyors (1991);
- The Surveyor's Contribution to Land Management (1991);
- FAO and FIG Future Collaboration in Cadastral Reform in Rural Economics in Transition: report of round table meeting (1995);
- The FIG Statement on the Cadastre (1995);
- Land Tenure, Land Management and Land Information Systems: report of FIG, FAO and UNCHS round table meetings (1995);
- Statement of Ethical Principles and Model Code of Professional Conduct (1998);
- The Bathurst Declaration on Land Administration for Sustainable (1999);
- FIG Agenda 21 (2001);
- Women's Access to Land – FIG Guidelines. Principles for Equitable Gender Inclusion in Land Administration: Background Report and Guidelines (2001).

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.

Preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg have been continuing since CSD 8, and they continue to reflect concerns about land tenure related issues as a priority to be addressed.

The Land Tenure Service functions against this background as one of the constituent services of FAO's Rural Development Division, which is itself a 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 of the landless 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 has recently advertised for and 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 "regular programme" activities and are distinguished from the project-based work, known as the "field programme".

3.1 The regular programme

"Regular 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. We are currently in the process of finalising the work to be undertaken during the 2002-03 biennium. 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 regular programme are monitored and evaluated from a quality assurance standpoint.

3.2 The field programme

In addition to its regular 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 regular 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

The Land Tenure Service is actively involved in both regular and field programme activities.

4.1 The regular programme

The Land Tenure Service's regular programme activities planned for the 2002-03 biennium will generate the following specific outputs:

- **Develop methodology and construct database on land tenure.** (Global)
- **Guidelines for government assisted agrarian reform policies.** (Based on a comparative analysis of experiences, including gender and demographic considerations, in Latin America, Asia and Southern Africa.)
- **Guidelines for land consolidation and development policies and procedures.** (Based on a comparative analysis of experiences, including gender and demographic considerations, in Central and Eastern Europe and Near East.)
- **Methodological guidelines on education, and training strategies and materials for strengthening human capital needed for improved land tenure policies and land administration.** (Based on comparative analysis of experiences in Africa, Asia and Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America)
- **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.** (Based on comparative analysis of case studies.)
- **Issue paper for indigenous common tenure (pastoralism) regimes in the Near East.** (Based on case study of Syria and other countries.)
- **Guidelines for negotiated land conflict resolution** (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 external funding, an example of which is the terminological database that is being established as a thesaurus of land related terms, to support multilingual interpretation of land tenure related concepts and to assist users in understanding key issues in land tenure.

There is a clear emphasis on generating guidelines and good practice during this period which will be vitally important in sustaining and developing our field programme activities for the future.

In addition to these programmed activities, a very substantial volume of regular programme related work is undertaken by the Land Tenure Service 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 Africa region, to cite just one example, it has had a long association with developing and supporting the implementation of land tenure related policies in many of the Organization's member nations in Africa, particularly in the Southern and East Africa sub-region. Specific countries where the Service is currently committed range from a project dealing with land fragmentation in Tunisia to current discussions in Zimbabwe on land related information, and from emergency assistance in Angola identifying community boundaries to long standing work in Mozambique with the Land Commission. Similar lists of projects can be instanced in the Asia-Pacific region, in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Near East.

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.

In times of finite budgets, rising to meet these demands requires careful husbanding of resources and a sharp eye for sources of complementary or supplementary finance. The trend

towards broadened links with the private sector and non-governmental organizations and others for co-financing and co-operative initiatives is bound to increase.

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.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Paul Munro-Faure is chair of FIG's Commission 7, Cadastre and Land Management, and Chief of the Land Tenure Service, FAO