

Land tenure security and poverty reduction

Land is fundamental to the lives of poor rural people. It is a source of food, shelter, income and social identity. Secure access to land reduces vulnerability to hunger and poverty. But for many of the world's poor rural people in developing countries, access is becoming more tenuous than ever.

Competition for land has never been greater. Pressure on land is increasing as a result of a rising world population, climate change, declining soil fertility and the need for global food and fuel security. With governments and businesses now recognizing the potential of growing biofuel crops on land that cannot sustain food crops, even less fertile agricultural land may now have value. Desertification and reduced availability of water compound these issues.

There are some 1.3 billion extremely poor people in the world, struggling to survive on less than US\$1.25 a day. About 70 per cent live in the rural areas of developing countries. In rural societies, the poorest people often have weak or unprotected tenure rights. They therefore risk losing land they depend on to more powerful neighbours, to private companies – domestic or foreign – and even to members of their own family. Women are particularly vulnerable because their land rights may be obtained through kinship relationships with men or marriage. If those links are severed, women can lose their rights.



When insufficient attention is paid to secure access by small-scale producers and to land tenure issues, development projects can become part of the problem. For example, when irrigation is introduced into previously rainfed farmland or roads are built to link farmers to markets, the new economic potential of the land makes it more attractive, and small-scale producers can lose out to more affluent or powerful settlers.

Tenure security is important not only for agricultural production. It also allows people to diversify their livelihoods by using their land as collateral, renting it out or selling it.

Tenure issues affect the everyday choices of poor rural women and men, such as which crops to grow and whether crops are grown for subsistence or commercial purposes. They influence the extent to which farmers are prepared to invest in the long-term wellbeing of their land or to adopt new technologies and innovations. Lack of secure land tenure exacerbates poverty and has contributed to social instability and conflict in many parts of the world.

Today, public and private corporations are investing in millions of hectares of land in Africa, Asia and Latin America to produce food or biofuels. This trend offers developing countries an opportunity to attract foreign and domestic investment that raises agricultural productivity, but it also brings a potential threat to the land rights of small-scale producers and indigenous communities.

Even when land is classified as communal, under-utilized or marginal, it may provide a vital base for the livelihoods of poor people, who use it for crop farming, herding, or collecting fuelwood or medicines.

Land tenure security – for both women and men – is just one step on the road to reducing rural poverty. Measures to increase tenure security must be complemented by pro-poor policies, services and investments. Policies beyond the national level are needed to address such issues as use of irrigation water, migration, pastoralism and conflicts that cut across regional and national boundaries.

What should be done?

Land: farmland, wetlands, pastures and forest

Land tenure: rules, norms and institutions that govern access to land

Land tenure security: enforceable claims on land supported by national regulatory frameworks

Policies and legislation must recognize the many facets of land rights and usage. Above all, poor rural people must be empowered to participate in policy formulation to ensure that their needs and rights are addressed and protected. Securing land rights is a complicated business. Land tenure systems can be formal or informal, statutory or customary, permanent or temporary. Some are legally recognized, others are not. Some involve private ownership, others are based on common property.

There is no single solution. Legally registered individual land rights are not always best for poor rural people. Many depend on more flexible, diversified and common-property systems, where they can exert greater influence. Sometimes improved tenancy arrangements meet their needs better than private ownership. Policy frameworks need to accommodate and build on customary norms and practices.

It is often better to strengthen traditional administrative systems than to establish new, formal systems of land ownership. This is particularly true of communal and common-property lands, which are very important to the livelihoods of poor rural people. Mechanisms for securing indigenous peoples' rights to their lands are important to cultural survival.

IFAD and land tenure security

IFAD uses various tools and approaches to strengthen poor rural people's access and tenure and their ability to better manage land and natural resources, individually and collectively. These include:

- recognizing and documenting group rights to rangelands and grazing lands, forests and artisanal fishing waters
- recognizing and documenting smallholder farmers' land and water rights in irrigation schemes
- strengthening women's secure access to land
- using geographic information systems to map land and natural resource rights, use and management
- identifying best practices in securing these rights through business partnerships between smallholder farmers and investors

IFAD's partners in this endeavour include governments, civil society organizations, development institutions and other United Nations agencies, particularly the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). IFAD is also a founding member of the International Land Coalition and hosts its secretariat. In 2008, IFAD's Executive Board endorsed a new policy on access to land and tenure security, underscoring the importance of land issues to the organization.

IFAD has collaborated with FAO and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to formulate the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, which were formally endorsed by the CFS in May 2012. IFAD is also a partner in the development of the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment, together with FAO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Bank. The seven principles cover issues such as recognition of existing land rights, strengthening food security, transparent processes, consultation and respect for the rule of law.

IFAD worked with the African Union Commission and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to draft pan-African land policy guidelines. These were endorsed in 2009.



Land for all: reforms in Madagascar

In Madagascar, poor rural people had long been barred from owning the land they depended on for their survival. In 2005, the Government of Madagascar introduced a land policy to improve land tenure security across the country. This enabled Malagasies to formalize ownership of the land they depended on, using a simple certification process.

IFAD supports this extensive programme and as part of IFAD-funded projects, local land administration offices have been issuing land certificates to local people to secure tenure of the land they are working.

"I'm very happy to have my land certified," says Bruno Zafimihary, a rice and cassava farmer. "This new system is a quick and easy way of securing our land. Now the land is safe for my children and grandchildren."

Forest regeneration in Nepal

Poor people can contribute to regenerating degraded forests when they have secure land tenure. This has been the experience in Nepal, where community forestry has been widely promoted and IFAD began to focus on leasehold forestry in 1990. Through a project aimed at raising incomes and improving ecological conditions, groups of the poorest people in highland villages obtained long-term leases to severely degraded areas of forest. Through 40-year renewable leases, the project transferred small blocks of public forest land to groups of poor households. The households regenerate, manage and protect the land.

Specific sites were designated as leasehold forest, and cooperative groups were formed to prevent expropriation by local elites. The groups undertook activities such as cleaning up village environments, improving forest trails and constructing water systems. They also helped with conflict resolution. Work now continues under the Leasehold

Since 2006, IFAD has supported a total of 71 land offices and more than 3,100 land certificates have been issued. One of the challenges is to ensure that land certificates are distributed equitably, including to the poorest and to women. The issues of sharecropping and secondary land use rights, as well as pastoral rights must also be addressed. Moreover, rural people often have no birth certificate, and therefore no identity card, which means that they are barred from applying for a land certificate. For this reason, IFAD has been supporting government services in delivering identity papers to those who lack them.

Forestry and Livestock Programme, which builds on the successes of the earlier project. More than 4,000 leasehold forest user groups have been formed, involving more than 38,000 households. The groups have received leases for almost 20,000 hectares of land.

As part of the project's activities, participating households receive two goats each, together with veterinary and technical assistance. Goat meat is a favourite food for festivals and also a source of income for poor families. The goats are kept tethered to prevent damage to young plants.

Before work started, about 95 per cent of the plots were degraded. A study carried out in 2009 found that 69 per cent of the plots had been rehabilitated. Household income over the project period has increased by more than 70 per cent. Indigenous peoples and low-caste groups had benefited proportionally more than higher caste households, underscoring the improvement in the lives of the target beneficiaries.

Formalizing rights to ancestral lands in Latin America

Most indigenous and tribal peoples and ethnic minorities have culturally distinct land tenure systems based on collective rights. In many parts of the world, these systems are only partially recognized by governments and legal systems, leading to social and political marginalization, poverty and conflict. If indigenous peoples are to survive and prosper, culturally and economically, they must have secure rights to their ancestral lands and territories.

IFAD-funded projects focusing on indigenous peoples provide legal advice and assistance that includes titling of land and water rights.

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, IFAD worked with indigenous peoples (including the Tacanas, Chimanés and Trinitarios) to strengthen their organizations and involve

them in the land reform process. The first step was to bring about legal recognition of indigenous communities – a prerequisite for obtaining collective titles to ancestral land and territories.

As a result of the project, about 1.3 million hectares were delimited and titled, benefiting 157 indigenous communities of more than 15,500 men and women. The work is now being continued by national and regional governments in the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

In Ecuador, community land was delineated and legal titles were obtained under the IFAD-funded Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples' Development Project. And in Panama the territory of the Ngöbe-Buglé people was legally recognized following IFAD's intervention.



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LINKS

IFAD and Land Issues

<http://www.ifad.org/english/land/index.htm>

Women's Land Rights Project

http://www.ifad.org/english/land/women_land/index.htm

IFAD Occasional Paper 2

Responding to 'Land Grabbing' and
Promoting Responsible Investment
in Agriculture

http://www.ifad.org/pub/op/2_e.pdf

International Land Coalition

<http://www.landcoalition.org>

FAO Natural Resources and Environment

<http://www.fao.org/nr/nr-home/en>

Global Land Tool Network

<http://www.gltn.net/>

Le Hub Rural (IFAD-supported portal)

<http://www.hubrural.org>

International Institute for Environment and Development: Land acquisitions and rights

<http://www.iied.org/land-acquisitions-rights>

UN-HABITAT: Land and Tenure Section

<http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=423>



IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.

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Women and land

Today, more and more women are heading rural households. Yet women often have weak rights to the land they farm, or are denied rights entirely by law or custom, and even by their families. This has thrown many women and their children into poverty. IFAD's Women's Land Rights Project has been working since 2008 to strengthen land rights for women across the globe.

In Burundi, where women's inheritance rights are often not respected, land disputes between neighbours and family members are now seen as a major cause of the 12-year civil war that ended in 2005. An IFAD-funded project is building community awareness of legal processes, while providing legal advice and helping women fight their cases in court. A first step in the initiative is literacy classes, so that women can read legal documents before signing them. The resolution of land disputes is a key factor in helping Burundi rebuild a peaceful society.

The same issues afflict women in Kenya. Monica was 28 and a mother of six children when her husband died. Family tradition and local customs dictate that land is passed on to future generations through the family or clan, so she had to fight to keep a plot of land to grow food for her children.

"I had 1.5 acres when my husband was alive. After he died, my brother-in-law grabbed one acre and built a hut on the remaining half acre," she said. "I went to the chief for help who explained that he would need the elders to make a decision. The chief and elders walked around my boundaries and said my brother-in-law should give me back the land. At first my brother-in-law agreed, but as soon as the chief and elders left, he told me to get off the land and if I were to come back I would lose my neck."

In Kenya and elsewhere, IFAD is working with local leaders and women's groups to help them protect women's land rights. When women have land security, they can grow more and earn more. When women earn more, they usually spend a higher proportion on caring for the family than do men. Strengthening women's land rights not only contributes to gender equality, it also improves food security and reduces poverty for the whole family.

Inclusive business models across Africa

Much media attention has been focused in recent years on the potentially negative impacts on poor rural people of large-scale land acquisitions – particularly by foreign investors. Poor rural people are also vulnerable to powerful domestic investors, who contribute to the process of land concentration and increasing inequalities, and to weaknesses in national land administration systems.

IFAD supports investment by smallholder farmers, pastoralists and indigenous peoples in their own production systems. It is also working with partners to identify alternative business models that can strengthen land and natural resource rights and boost agricultural development. These alternative ways of structuring agricultural investments include different types of contract farming schemes, joint ventures, management contracts and new supply chain relationships.

In Rwanda, an IFAD-supported project helped tea growers to gain secure access to their land and form cooperatives. When a new private sector factory opened in 2008, the project helped farmers' cooperatives gain a 15 per cent stake.

Poor rural communities have been linked to markets by the Southern African Natural Products Trade Association – or Phytotrade Africa – set up with IFAD support in 2001. Rural harvesters gather wild fruits and seeds from common land to sell to members of the association. In 2010 over 10,000 harvesters – over 80 per cent of them women – sold plant materials for a value of US\$585,000.

With IFAD's support, smallholder farmers are partnering with Mali Biocarburant SA in a combination of a joint venture and contract farming. The farmers have kept their land rights, they sell jatropha nuts for processing and also make money as shareholders. To protect food security, the jatropha trees are intercropped with food crops or grown on unproductive land.