

Food Security: Issues for Land Policy and Administration in Developing Countries

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1. The first MDG concerns the reduction of both poverty *and* hunger. In many discussions, “hunger” is subsumed into “poverty”, but this may deflect attention from ways of specifically addressing hunger. DFID is committed to achieving major reductions in hunger, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the Rome Food Security conference in June 2008, DFID set the international challenge of doubling agricultural productivity in Africa by 2015.
2. Periods of high food prices, peaking in early/mid-2008, increased hunger, especially among children. High prices spurred a massive supply response, resulting in record global grain production, of over 2 billion tonnes. But almost all the increased production was in OECD countries. Prices have come down, but food security is now threatened by global financial crisis and by declining household incomes.
3. Global food production will have to rise by 50% by 2030 to meet the needs of growing populations. Some of this increase must come from developing countries themselves, and in most contexts, in both North and South, there remains plenty of scope for increasing yields.
4. Some developing countries may be able to finance food imports from foreign exchange earnings; others may find it realistic and politically desirable to grow the bulk of their own staples. For many, food security will involve at least some element of increased food production.
5. ***Land Policy and Administration*** are a crucial part of the enabling framework for increased agricultural productivity, and there is now much evidence to demonstrate that they can help to raise productivity and enhance livelihoods on both owned and rented land in developing countries in several ways, e.g.:
 - By enhancing security of tenure, which in turn creates an environment conducive to investment and risk-taking;
 - By providing a source of collateral for credit;
 - By allowing more rapid and secure land transactions, in both sale and rental markets;
 - By providing a source of capital for those wishing to leave agriculture, and, over the long term, allowing land consolidation.

Progress is being made in titling and in freeing-up rental markets, but what kinds of demands will increased food production make on land policy and administration for the future, what challenges will it face, and how can it best respond?

6. Among the challenges are that:
 - Fertile land is being converted into urban uses (housing, infrastructure, industry, and urban-driven leisure uses);
 - Administrators and elites capture the benefits of conversion, to the exclusion of the poor;
 - Land is being acquired on a large scale by the corporate sector, including foreign investors eager to grow more food and fibre, often for export, and increasingly to provide food security in other countries;
 - Linked to this, land is being allocated to biofuel production in response to economic, environmental and “energy security” considerations.

7. For the future, apart from responding to these threats, land policy will have to be framed around questions such as:
 - Who, at what pace, and from what areas, will wish to exit agriculture for other livelihoods? What assistance should be given? Does land administration need to be modified to allow “good” exits, yet permit the land still to be used productively? In areas where large numbers of productive workers have “left the land”, do particular measures need to be taken to encourage land sales or leases and consolidation of holdings?
 - Will the best productivity growth prospects lie with small or larger farms for the future? (small farms performed well in the Green Revolution, but larger ones may be better suited to the information age).
 - How can the basic rights that people have to their land be reconciled with the need for foreign exchange generated by exports and/or leases to foreign corporations?

In essence, the question centres around the functioning of land markets (for sale and rental). Land markets can be improved, but not just by measures focusing on security of titling and leasehold. For instance, measures such as safeguards to prevent misuse of privileged information (and to improve the way information is made public) can help to prevent the poor from being exploited during “conversion”. As well as improving the functioning of markets in these ways, are measures needed to regulate markets better (as the world has recently discovered in relation to financial markets)? Do, for instance, measures need to be put in place to protect local people’s rights in the face of lease or sale of large plots of land to the corporate sector?

8. The answer to these questions will depend on how accurate our future visions of agriculture are. What will African agriculture look like in 20 years’ time? Which of the above questions (and others) will land policy and administration have to respond to, and how?