

Land reform North and South

Reform of land tenure legislation is a major area of debate in many African countries. Key issues include how best to reconcile customary practice with statutory codes, if farmers need paper titles to feel secure enough to invest in land, and how to design a consultation process to accommodate the views and interests of different stakeholders.

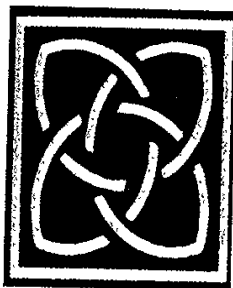
But land reform has also become a big new area for policy debate

in Scotland. Many of the conditions are different from those found in sub-Saharan Africa, but the processes involved have a lot in common. Key issues in Scotland include how to make sure land owners consider the interests and needs of local communities and involve them in decisions which may affect them, whether to grant public money so that community groups can buy land when it comes onto the market, and how best to establish a code of management which means that all land owners perform to the standards of the best.

Land has become a key issue in Scotland because of the decentralisation process currently underway which will see the establishment of a parliament in Scotland for the first time in nearly 300 years. Land is seen as a centrally important resource needed to provide for sustainable and diverse livelihoods throughout rural areas. Ownership patterns have tended to be highly skewed with a very small number of people holding enormous estates. A few highly publicised cases of very bad management have generated concern about the freedom of land owners to make decisions which may have adverse impacts on tenants and local people.

A consultation process has been under way over the last year to gather views on land reform options from as broad a range of people and organisations as possible. We hope to keep track of this consultation process as an interesting parallel to similar debates going on in various African countries.

For copies of the consultation documents, contact Brian Lawson, Land Reform Policy Secretariat, Fax: +44.131.244.6259 Email: brian.lawson@so076.scotoff.gov.uk



FEEDBACK

"It never rains but it pours... in Niger"

The people of Niger, whether they be townsfolk, herders or farmers will not forget the rainy season of 1998. For the previous two years harvests had been below average and, in some regions, the millet crop had dried out in the fields before reaching maturity. Dry grass which is the staple of cattle herds for eight months of the year, was in very short supply, and pastoralists were suffering the accumulated problems of two lean years.

In March of this year, distressed herders were already roaming the pastoral zone in search of any remaining grass which might have survived the wind or burning heat. Between May and July, herders were paying farmers 1,000 FCFA (US\$ 1.60) for bales of straw too small to feed a cow for one day. They were even allowing their cattle to eat the mats and thatched roofs of their huts. Though hungry themselves because of the rising price of millet (27,000 FCFA a sack in the pastoral zone), they spent days and nights struggling to keep the weakened cattle on their feet. Butchers were coming in from Nigeria to buy the dying cattle at 1,000 – 2,000 FCFA a head and dry the meat on the spot.

When the price of a pregnant heifer would not buy even one sack of millet, how could herders survive? How could they avoid running through the accumulated capital of a lifetime in one short month? Losses were severe, with many cattle dying (some pastoralists lost their entire herds) and the bottom falling out of the market.

Land tenure problems also contributed to the problems associated with the end of the dry season. Pastoral areas in arable regions have all but disappeared, and the wetlands are all under cultivation.