

FOOD SECURITY: INNOVATIVE AND BROAD-BASED STANDARDS

EDITORIAL

Over the last ten years, around the world, an area of land roughly 50 times the size of Switzerland has been ceded in land leases. More and more frequently, these land concessions become a source of tension, which sometimes turns to violence. Moreover, political issues concerning access to land might be a threat to food security in a large number of countries.

The SDC approaches this issue from various angles. On the one hand, it is strongly active in agriculture, supporting small-holder food producers in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as in Latin America. The collective governance of land, pastures and forests is directly linked to the prevention and mitigation of conflicts. In those places where it is active, the SDC encourages the participation of all stakeholders and the empowerment of rural communities.

On the other hand, since 2008, the SDC has supported the emergence of a global strategic approach to land governance. It advocates the implementation and application of regulatory frameworks for gov-

erning land and other natural resources, and contributes to defining criteria for responsible investment in agriculture.

In close cooperation with other states, the private sector, NGOs and other public and private international institutions, the SDC participates in the implementation of the "Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of Food Security", which was adopted in 2012. Better still, it was Switzerland that led the negotiations on finalising the "Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI)", which were successfully concluded in August 2014 in Rome.

The following articles reflect the SDC's commitment and the significant results we have already achieved. Numerous challenges in the area of food security remain. However, through the different approaches on which it bases its actions, the SDC will continue to contribute without let or hindrance to overcoming them.

Dominique Favre
Deputy Assistant Director General

GOOD PRACTICE IN THE LAND GOVERNANCE

The "size of a football pitch" has become a unit of measure commonly used to depict a surface area. But who can imagine 52 218 949 football pitches? That is the total surface area of all concluded, intended or failed acquisitions of agricultural land in the world. That is nine times the size of Switzerland. The Land Matrix Initiative's website which provides these figures points out that they are to give a general idea only. Exact data is hard to obtain.

The volume of these transfers, however, is certainly on the increase, without real control and poses a threat to the food security of the most vulnerable populations. A list of the principles aiming to supervise these investments (see p. 3) has just been adopted by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). However, these rules are only of value if land management is clearly defined. This is the aim of a compilation of guidelines decreed by the CFS in 2012 and which is now starting to show results.

Growing awareness

The food crisis of 2008, which resulted from a combination of poor regional harvests, rising world prices and speculation, had the effect of an electric shock: millions of hectares of arable land in developing countries were transformed into cash-generating industrial crops, some of them non-food. This happened despite the fact that three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas. Almost 90% of them depend on agriculture, often without any recognised rights on the plots they farm. This growing awareness is in line with a wider reflection stimulated by the run up to the Rio+20 Conference: the world population is increasing but we live in a finite world that needs to be managed sparingly. In 2012, the "Voluntary Guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land" were published in this global context.



Rice fields near a Laotian village. As natural resources including land and water are limited, it is important to invest responsibly.

The document was written following extensive international consultations by the CFS. This intergovernmental platform based in Rome is devoted to food security and nutrition. A member of its governing body, Switzerland took an active part in drafting the text. The guidelines' main goal is to ensure that the most vulnerable, rural populations in developing countries have access to and control of the natural resources on which they depend.

Concrete recommendations

The publication describes, in over 40 pages, the "internationally recognised practices" aimed at improving land governance. The guidelines concern land, forests and fisheries. The document's introduction stipulates that the guidelines must be "interpreted and implemented in compliance with existing requirements".

With regard to legal recognition and the allocation of "tenure rights and duties", the guidelines recommend the establishment of land records, the protection of existing rights, even subsidiary ones (such as gathering rights), equal rights for men and women, protection against illegal forced evictions, etc. They consider the use of public areas and the fact that "land, fisheries and forests have a social, cultural, spiritual, economic, environmental and political value for indigenous peoples (...)". The rights of the latter are the subject of a detailed chapter, a sign that they are particularly under threat.

A large part of the guidelines, of course, is directed at the transfer and reallocation of

rights "through markets", which ought to take place in clear and non-discriminatory circumstances and in accordance with the law. In particular, "states should ensure that when facilitating market operations of tenure transactions, they protect the tenure rights of small-scale producers". Furthermore, the investments should contribute to the eradication of poverty, to food security and the sustainable use of land, fisheries and forests.

The publication also addresses amongst other subjects, the problem of expropriation, the administration of tenure or actions to respond to climate change, emergencies and natural disasters. On a more local scale, the recommendations also concern conflicts about rights between members of the same family or between land users, for example farmers and pastoralists.

International legitimacy

Are the guidelines useful and applicable? The question is worth asking as not only are the guidelines voluntary but they were written with extreme caution and much use of the conditional tense. "It was the only way of getting a text that everyone could agree on, which facilitates its actual implementation", explains Alexandre Ghélew, SDC programme officer, who took part in the negotiations. The text derives its legitimacy from the extensive consultations which preceded its compilation, a process led by the CFS. In 2009, this committee, composed of UN member states, underwent a reform which opened it to "all interested parties" (private sector, civil so-

ciety, international organisations, research, etc.) with a view to working "collectively and in a coordinated manner" towards food security.

Between 2009 and 2010, fifteen meetings in 133 countries enabled the opinions of more than a thousand people from all interested parties to be collected. This phase was followed by an electronic consultation which broadened the project. On this basis, the states negotiated the guidelines.

The document's legitimacy is strengthened by the fact that it was approved by the Rio+20 Conference, the G8, the G20 and the General Assembly of the United Nations. Furthermore, multinationals such as Nestlé, Coca Cola and Cargill have expressed their wish to apply it. "It is an important tool on which small-scale producers, NGOs and parliaments can rely for the establishment and observance of land rights", says Alexandre Ghélew. "But it is clear that its application requires a political will in the long term so that an open dialogue can take place".

Long-term effects

The changes arising from the implementation the guidelines will be measured in generations. For the time being, national workshops are being organised to discuss their actual application. In the Philippines, for example, a meeting held in March 2014 with 120 participants from all walks of life highlighted the considerable discontinuity of numerous land laws in the country, which is a source of conflict.

For a long time now, Switzerland has applied many of the steps recommended in the guidelines, in particular with regard to the recognition of customary rights. Thus, as early as the 1990s, an SDC programme in Niger aimed at encouraging the shared use of resources between farmers and nomadic pastoralists. In application of the guidelines, the SDC is currently setting up a regional project in four countries bordering the Mekong. It aims to ensure that rural populations, in particular ethnic minorities, have access to and control of farmland, forests and fisheries.



In rural areas such as here in Laos, programmes to reduce poverty also include informing local people about their land rights.

THREE QUESTIONS TO...



Robynne Anderson, who works internationally on agricultural development and represents the International Agri-Food Network, the focal

point for the private sector mechanism to the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in Rome. She is from a family farm in Manitoba, Canada.

The private sector was not very active during the negotiations of the guidelines, according to a document released by the FAO¹. It was more present to

1. Reaching Consensus on the Governance of Tenure. Working Paper No.25, 2014.

discuss the principles. Can you explain why?

Thanks to the leadership of the Swiss government and the outstanding skills of the chairperson, Christina Blank, it was possible for all stakeholders to be true contributors to the Principles.

The private sector was involved during the negotiation of the Voluntary Guidelines and has expanded engagement since the reform of the CFS created a seat for the private sector. For example, at the CFS plenary in 2014, the private sector has a delegation of more than 80 private sector representatives.

The Guidelines (VGGT) and Principles (RAI) are voluntary and refer to universal human rights or other widely accepted documents, treaties or conventions. Would the private sector be in favor of more binding texts?

Like the member states involved in the negotiations, the private sector believes that the national governments have the authority and responsibility to create a conducive operating environment and binding laws regarding agricultural investment.

“Land grabbing” became a major issue in recent years. How can and will the agro-industrial companies investing in developing countries make efforts to abide to the Guidelines and Principles?

The private sector supported the development of the “Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems” and will be pleased to work on their implementation because there is an urgent need for more investment in agriculture, especially in developing countries. The focus must now be on capacity building, information sharing, and the means to best apply them – by governments, businesses and other actors.

THE 10 PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

For a long time, agricultural investments were neglected in developing countries. Today it is accepted that they are an essential tool in the battle for food security, whether they are made by small-scale producers, private multinational or local businesses, states or international institutions. And, of course, they must meet criteria that reinforce this security.

The “Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems” which were adopted last October are designed precisely to offer such a reference framework. They were negotiated under the guidance of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in Rome and complete the land tenure guidelines finalised in 2012 (see p. 1).

Consistency with the guidelines

The principles apply to the whole agricultural industry, from production to consumption of food and non-food products, whether they come from agriculture, livestock farming, forestry or fishing. The investments must contribute to food security by “increasing sustainable production and productivity of safe, nutritious, diverse, and culturally acceptable food and reducing food loss and waste”. They

also contribute to “inclusive” economic development and the eradication of poverty, encourage gender equality, manage resources in a sustainable way, respect cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, to quote the most striking points. Lastly, the principles envisage transparency in investments with a grievance mechanism as well as ways of monitoring the economic, social, environmental and cultural impact of investments.

Negotiations coordinated by Switzerland

The principles are voluntary, as is the case with the guidelines. Their main quality, however, is their existence; the result of a consensus developed over a long time which has enabled a common vision to be defined between all parties involved. A first version of the principles was compiled in 2010 by four organisations (FAO, IFAD, UNCTAD and the World Bank). It was harshly criticised, in particular by the NGOs as being top-down, thus legitimising the acquisition of land to the detriment of local communities.

The current version, therefore, was subject to a wide consultation, as were the guidelines. Switzerland, a member of the CFS Bureau, was given the task of coordinating the process which has just been completed. These principles are perfectly in line with efforts to reduce poverty and global risks which are part of the SDC’s mandate.

The SDC already applies the most important aspects of the principles (and the guidelines) in its activities at global, regional and country level.

Winning models

Commercial investment models which respect local communities are not only possible but profitable. A report published by the World Bank and UNCTAD in April 2014 reports on the impact of large agricultural investments considered to be responsible on the performance of the companies on the one hand and on the local communities on the other. This study is based on 39 agribusiness companies applying extremely diverse models in Africa and Asia. “The investors who had the greatest success in financial and operational terms tend to be those who have the most positive outcome for their host economies (...), the result of more sophisticated approaches to social and environmental responsibility”, the report says. The application of the principles should encourage this type of approach.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Acquisitions of agricultural land in developing countries for the commercial production of food and other crops are increasing. They are often made at the expense of the local rural populations, whose rights are poorly recognised, if at all.
- 2 The world food crisis of 2008 also highlighted the lack of investment in the agricultural sector in favour of the most vulnerable rural communities in developing countries. In response to these two observations, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), based in Rome, produced two reference documents.
- 3 Open to all parties concerned, the CFS organised extensive international consultations which lead to the publication of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Land Governance in 2012, which were supplemented by the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems in October 2014.
- 4 Switzerland is a member of the CFS Bureau and in this capacity was fully involved in the political dialogue at global and regional level which preceded the adoption of the guidelines and principles. It was responsible for conducting negotiations on this latter publication. The SDC has for a long time been familiar with the fundamental measures recommended in these texts.
- 5 The guidelines and principles are voluntary but enjoy broad legitimacy thanks to the many consultations which preceded their compilation and the fact that the negotiations were wide open to all interested parties. The value of these documents has been recognised at international level, including the General Assembly of the United Nations and other large multinationals, facilitating their use in the field. The impact expected from these standards will however be measured in terms of generations.



Rye harvest in Bangladesh. Global food security depends primarily on small-scale farmers.

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

(www.sdc.admin.ch/projects)

Regulating land use

In the Horn of Africa, vulnerable population groups such as nomadic pastoralists – the region's greatest land users – are particularly affected by the inadequate regulation of land use. The SDC supports the African institutions in developing and implementing a regional land governance strategy.

Developing quality standards for investments in the agricultural sector

In cooperation with governments, international and local investors, civil society and members of parliament, the SDC works to develop framework conditions that apply to investments in the agricultural sector in developing countries. This creates an environment for investments which safeguards food security, respects land ownership and resource rights and thus improves the livelihoods of local communities and smallholder farmers.

Enabling secure and equal access to natural resources

In the global competition for agricultural land and natural resources, poor rural population groups need to be represented. The SDC supports the International Land Coalition, a global alliance which is working at the local, national, regional and global level to achieve equal and secure land access in 50 countries.

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Editor

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDC, Directorate Global Cooperation
Freiburgstrasse 130, CH-3003 Berne
info@deza.admin.ch, www.deza.admin.ch

Photos Adrian Gnägi/ DDC, Touravanh Hook/
DDC, Scott Wallace/ World Bank

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