



Brussels Rural Development Briefings
A series of meetings on ACP-EU development issues

**Briefing session n° 9: Land access and rural development:
new challenges, new opportunities**

25 February 2009

A Land Reform Agenda: Lessons from the AU-ECA-AfDB Land Policy Initiative
Joan Kagwanja - United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Executive Summary

Background

Historical injustices including colonial legacy and post-colonial governance have seen injustice in land allocation, including displacement of entire communities, favouritism and land grabbing, shaping the land ownership landscape in Africa today. Redressing these injustices has the potential to awaken 'demons,' potentially shifting power, with social, political and economic consequences. Not only is it necessary to address the land question in the context of social justice and equal economic opportunity, land underlines any policy agenda for economic growth and sustainable development.

Population growth and Rapid urbanization have resulted in increased demand for land to grow food as well as that for settlement and urban development. This is especially renewed by the current food crisis as well as the push for improved urban development, including slum upgrading. Recent developments point to increased demand of land by foreign governments and private investors for African land. On the one hand this offers opportunities for Africans through increased food security and job opportunities on- and off-farm through foreign direct investments and increase trade opportunities. Harnessing these opportunities, however require an environment that allows both local and foreign investors to gain secure property rights without increasing the vulnerability of poor landowners and users who depend on land for multiple purposes.

Increasingly, many African governments are aware of the critical need to balance land for investment and the needs of local communities. What is not clear, however, is the types of land governance systems that best reach such a balance, calling for guidelines to inform governments in land reform processes. This is what the AU-ECA-AfDB Land Policy Initiative (LPI) sought to do by embarking on a rigorous roadmap involving assessment studies and consultations on land policy in Africa. That process, which involved a variety of stakeholders and partners, began in March 2006, culminating in the development of a draft Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa set to be reviewed by Experts and Ministers responsible for Land in April 2009 and a declaration on land policy adopted by African Heads of States in the AU Summit in July 2009. The guidelines form a critical tool for African governments, donors, partners and stakeholders who are/seek to engage in land reform.

Key Lessons from the AU-ECA-AfDB Land Policy Initiative (LPI)

1. A thorough assessment of the context, issues and lessons underlying the land question are critical and form part of the process for land policy development and administrative reforms
2. The understanding of - and inclusion of stakeholders- landowners, multiple land users, policymakers, administrators, donors, etc - is key to 'getting participation right' in the process of reforms.
3. Given the central role of land to broad-based development, land reform must be engraved in national development processes.
4. Land policy development is a long-term process that will only succeed if there is demonstrable commitment on the part of state and other stakeholders.

5. Lessons drawn by the LPI of reform processes point to: low degrees of stakeholder and civil society involvement; sector-driven policy development; failure to provide for adequate budgetary allocations; and inadequate human and institutional capacities.
6. With regard to policy implementation, the LPI noted the following as critical to this process: building consensus on effective implementation strategies; ensuring capacity to manage change; addressing faults with the policy development processes; collecting and building databases of baseline and other data; and ensuring an adequate implementation infrastructure.
7. While all actors during LPI consultation agreed that tracking progress in land policy development and implementation is vital, many acknowledged the need to develop systems, indicators and data important to this process.