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

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**Land governance and security of tenure in developing countries.**  
**The White Paper of French Development Cooperation**  
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***Executive Summary***

Land is a major economic and political issue. It is central to agricultural, rural development, development and urban planning policies, with land policies having a decisive impact on territorial development.

Land is a social relationship. The ways in which a society defines property rights in respect of land and natural resources, distributes them between the various members of society and guarantees and administers them are revealing of the way in which a society is managed.

From this perspective, the land issue has a direct impact on governance, defined as the art of governing, by linking the management of public affairs at different territorial levels, by regulating relationships within society and by coordinating the roles of the numerous parties involved. Land governance, over and above its social dimensions, refers to choices between competing economic functions of the land. Its aim is to reconcile, in accordance with laws and rules, the interests of the various categories of stakeholders and to involve citizens in decision-making processes, by taking account of local practices. Debate on the relations between land and political decision-making is all the more important since the relations which develop around land are extremely conflictual. The examination of this issue in the White Paper is therefore an extension of previous work conducted by French cooperation on the strategy of democratic governance and was adopted by the Interministerial Committee of International Cooperation and Development in December 2006.

The management of land and soil is an essential component of local politics, exerting a very strong influence on the conditions in which political power is exercised. It can give the public authorities the means to respond to the expectations of citizens who depend on it for their existence and their livelihood. In this regard land policies are a central element of development policies and policies intended to reduce poverty and inequalities, in particular by ensuring the security of land tenure. They can contribute to the prevention of conflicts, just as they can be the cause of them if conditions of access to land and the soil generate, in rural or urban areas, massive inequalities and insecurity. Land policies also play a part in resolving the tensions linked to demographic growth and population movements. By encouraging and reinforcing the security of investment, they contribute to confidence and economic growth. Finally, they are a key element in policies for the protection of the environment and the management of natural resources, and consequently sustainable development policies and strategies.

Over the last two decades, land-related work and practices of French stakeholders have helped to enrich the debate on several issues which are central to cooperation actions with our partners from the South, in both rural and urban areas. They have focused in particular on issues relating to the link between legal systems, the relations between them and the security of land tenure, the place of local laws, their legitimacy and their dynamics, forms of institutional support for experimental projects as well as national land law reform processes. These approaches deserve to be known and shared, both between French cooperation stakeholders, and between the latter and bilateral and multilateral cooperation institutions. These practical approaches have also made it possible to highlight the limits

encountered in the transfer of exogenous institutional land management models in contexts often characterised by legal pluralism and the need, therefore, to incorporate national situations, which are always specific, systematically into our cooperation policies.

The objective of the White Paper on “Land governance and the securing of rights in developing countries” is to provide a tool to facilitate exchanges and dialogue with all the stakeholders involved in projects having a land dimension or implications, and most importantly governments and international development aid partners. In a globalised world, it offers a critical examination of past and current actions by French cooperation actors. It offers a framework for the analysis of the land issue in order to understand its dynamics and to propose tools and types of actions, taking into account local, national and global constraints.

It would not have been possible to produce this White Paper without the work accomplished over the last fifteen years by members of the “Land and Development Committee” multi-disciplinary reflection group co-chaired by the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and the French Development Agency, which is composed of development researchers, experts and operators. This work has led to conceptual and methodological progress which has been recognised by the international community. From the middle of 2007, via thematic meetings, study days and exchanges, committee members have contributed to producing this White Paper.