

Land Tenure Security as the Holy Grail – Do Mapping and Registration Bring What Is Often Assumed?

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SUMMARY

Land tenure security is a key concept underlying many of the interventions in the field of land governance. Various projects within international programmes aim at increasing tenure security, in the first place as a desirable objective in land governance itself, providing security to people and their livelihoods. But it is also viewed as a contributing factor, even necessary condition, for the realization of downstream objectives such as conflict management and resolution, food security and economic development, and gender equality. While there is general support for the importance of land tenure security in fostering sustainable and just development, there is less unanimity on what it actually entails, or how it can and should be attained. Tenure security in practice is often viewed differently by different people, and attempts to promote it are often based on assumptions that are not made explicit – in some cases we may not even be aware of such implicit assumptions. This exposes interventions to certain risks that we should try to avoid.

This paper discusses land tenure security, as a concept and policy objective, and considers lessons on how to work with it in the framework of the Dutch Government's Land-at-scale programme interventions; especially on mapping and registration. It is clear that the large amount of literature on the topic is far from unanimous on the impact of, and conditions for, such interventions; reflecting the complexity of the subject. A key issue is whether the intervention is primarily aimed at protecting all those that currently have access to land (passive security) or primarily aims to improve the functioning and efficiency of the market of commodified land rights (active security). Other assumptions deal with the link to conflicts, gender, development agendas and the role of the different

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actors.

The paper will give an overview of key assumptions and literature linked to those, combined with some first experiences from the ongoing Land-at-scale projects where this may also be visible. An intervention only focussing on mapping and registration is rarely making any real impact, and always needs to be combined with an array of other activities. And when the overall land governance situation is very unstable or unequal, such an intervention will also not improve the livelihood of many vulnerable and marginalized people in the area. The recent trends in land administration may help, but still are not enough to reach true impact.

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