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Private land ownership in rural Burkina Faso

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PRIVATE LAND OWNERSHIP IN RURAL AREAS Land Policies and Local Customs in Burkina Faso

INTRODUCTION

Under what conditions can one become a landowner in the rural areas of Burkina Faso? The 1991 Agrarian and Land Tenure Reform (*Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière* - RAF) offered investors new possibilities by declaring that "Land belonging to the National Estate may be assigned as private property". In practice, however, how easy is it to apply this provision? If investors have difficulty in getting their land rights recognised in the rural areas, can one overcome this obstacle and use it as an argument for decentralised and concerted management?

The case of private irrigation schemes is a starting point for considering this question of individual legal ownership which is still little known in the countries of the Sahel.

With the RAF of 1991, the Burkina Faso Government sought to maintain a socially just land distribution, to prevent both farmers from being left landless and the accumulation of farmlands, whilst enhancing food security through agricultural intensification and by encouraging private investments. To these aims, development agencies and their sponsors, particularly the World Bank (Cleaver 1992, Cernea 1988), added natural resource regeneration and control of State powers to allocate land for development projects by taking it from local communities. (SOSUCO¹, AVV², Kou Valley, Bagré and eventually Ziga).

The aim of this paper is to examine how to resolve rural land issues in Burkina Faso with particular reference to private land ownership. The development of private land appropriation over the past twenty years has shown a great discrepancy between attempted policy measures and actual practical experience. Faced with the demand for private land ownership, the State has wavered; on the one hand it banned the buying and selling of land during the Revolution but then on the other hand, declared, with the RAF of 1991, that lands classified as

¹ SOSUCO Société Sucrière de la Comoé (Comoé Sugar Company).

² AVV: Autorité d'Aménagement des Vallées des Voltas (Volta Valleys Development Authority)

National Estate could be assigned as private property. In fact, the purchase of land by agricultural entrepreneurs, as well as any long-term control of access to the rich lowlands, has taken place without any State intervention, in ways which offer neither lasting security of tenure nor any guarantees of land maintenance.

I. DIFFICULTIES FACING PRIVATE LAND OWNERS

Many factors indicate that it was necessary to initiate far-reaching land reforms in Burkina Faso. Obviously, the control of land by local heads of family favours the constitution of village land reserves and the protection of natural resources. However, this process also excludes a segment of the population: young people and women find it difficult to acquire plots of land and few farmers living in impoverished regions can move in and settle on more fertile lands. Customary land-use laws make innovation difficult and, for example, it is considered that tree planting or long-term improvements change the land ownership status. Investors are viewed unfavourably if they do not belong to a local clan. Although they can obtain permission to install equipment, they have no guarantee of benefits from a long-term investment unless their social behaviour is irreproachable in the eyes of the customary landholders. The two RAFs of 1984 and 1991 tried in vain to curtail the powers of the traditional land authorities. The Law of 1984 prohibited land sales whilst that of 1991 encouraged the principle of private ownership through administrative channels.

Land Markets in the Pre-Revolutionary Era

Two laws were promulgated after the country's independence (in 1960 and 1963) with a view to regulating private land holdings and making it possible for the State to set land aside for special development projects.³ In the 1980s, the State appropriated more than two million hectares: 2,040,000 ha for the AVV and 10,000 ha of irrigated land, including 3,000 ha for SOSUCO. However, access to private land titles in rural areas has remained limited: only 19 land titles, for a total of less than 140 ha, were granted between 1952 and 1980 (D. Ouedraogo, 1986).

In undeveloped rural areas, monopoly of the best lands (lowlands for market gardening, tree cropping, rice growing, etc.) by local heads of family provides

³ Law No. 77 of 12th July 1960 and Law No. 29 of 24th July 1963

them with an asset that can be traded. They can loan out their plots, thus creating a clientele of debtors, or even allocate land in exchange for money as there exists an informal land market.

The land market is dynamic and differs according to sociological context: for example, in those parts of the Sahel peopled by the *Fulani*, the lower caste *Rimaabè* have appropriated low lying bas-fonds areas at the expense of the *Foulbè* who are more interested in buying cattle. This trend was accentuated during the 1973 and 1984 droughts, when *Foulbè* livestock were hard hit and they sought to barter or sell their possessions.

In the south-west, the use-rights of orchards around Bobo-Dioulasso are regularly sold by one government official to another at the end of his term of office in the province (a one-hectare orchard of mango, banana and citrus fruit trees with a group of huts and a well cost up to 300,000 CFA Francs to rent during the 1980s). In Banfora, during the prosperous early years of operation of SOSUCO, mango groves could be sold at the same price even without land titles.

On the Central Mossi Plateau, where the land is less fertile and water is scarce, there are no such land markets; but the areas around dams, where market gardening is practised, are under individual control. Around Ouagadougou, a tenant farmer can allow access to market gardening plots which do not belong to him and the beneficiaries have to render services in kind; however, there do not appear to be any monetary transactions, as the proceeds from the activities on these very small individual plots are not very significant. Similarly, in the areas surrounding the Sahelian lakes, customary landowners do not demand money for the use of their irrigated plots for dry season farming activities. The cultivation of French (green) beans along the shores of lakes Bam and Sian provides considerable benefit from the after-effects of the application of fertilisers in the cultivation of cereal crops during the rainy season; they must harvest their crops early - and so choose to cultivate early varieties of maize - so that they can hand over the land to market gardeners. These lowlands are cultivated continuously throughout the year.

Anyone who wants to cultivate 'free' or 'bush' land, which has not been appropriated by a clan or family head and to which no one can lay claim, has to secure permission from the land chief.⁴ This restriction was a form of

⁴ It is necessary to distinguish the role of the Village Chief, who plays an important role in the social life of his community - at least in the central and eastern parts of the country - from that of the Land Chief. There was virtually no provision for village

guarantee that enabled villages to protect their land reserves. It was also to prevent the sale of vast tracts of land although it did not prevent dynamic entrepreneurs from trying to circumvent these practices which they considered outmoded, as witnessed by the conflict that occurred between the Niaogho and Beghedo communities in the Bissa region in 1982 and 1983. Traders from Beghedo had tractors and wanted the Niaogho land chief to grant them more than one hundred hectares of land. However, the land chief found it difficult to get the villagers to acknowledge him as the owner of woodlands which his position gave him the right only to manage. (For more details, see Faure, 1990).

Before the Revolution, some lands thus had a commercial value but investors were unable to get this recognised outside a particular social and cultural setting. The lands belonged to a clan or village community and they could not obtain ownership in the Roman law sense of - ius, usus et abusus - the right to enjoy and sell land - and land titles were of no help in this respect.

The Revolution forestalled such land privatisation attempts. It also tried to curtail the powers of landholders: local family heads and those with customary rights.

The Agrarian and Land Tenure Reform of 1984 (RAF): "The Land Belongs to the State"

The affirmation in Article I of the RAF that 'the land belongs to the State' made a clean break with customary rights. The positive effect of this initiative was that it ended the aforementioned Niaogho-Beghedo conflict by removing the ambiguities concerning the status of 'free lands'. Because such lands did not belong to any clan, customary chiefs wrongly attempted to transform their 'managerial' rights into 'ownership' rights, i.e. the right to sell lands to traders who wanted to buy them. The 1984 Reform made this practice unlawful by prohibiting all land sales.

The negative aspect was that this revolutionary declaration, widely broadcast on

chief in the west of the country before colonisation. Throughout Burkina Faso, the Land Chief plays a religious and symbolic role. He guarantees access to land over an area whose boundaries are well known. He presides over fertility rituals during which farmers recognise the land rights of the local people. The Land Chief is responsible for expiation rituals in the event of violation of land-related social taboos: bloody clashes, sexual intercourse in the bush, etc.

the radio, created the conditions for open and free access to land reserves. The declaration's meaning was distorted and it was interpreted as meaning that 'free land belongs to those who cultivate it. Everywhere, people extended their farmland and took over new areas by clearing forests and grazing lands. This land occupation policy also found expression in continuous migration from the poor plateau lands of the Mossi region to the forest zones in the south and west, from where onchocerciasis had been eradicated. Emboldened by revolutionary declarations, the spontaneous settlers were no longer afraid of the customary guardians of these lands.

What was formerly considered as common land with restricted access became a freely accessible resource.

Policy-makers were aware of this trend in land occupation. The land issue was of great concern to the revolutionaries; radical groups advocated the creation of State farms to organise centrally planned production, whilst other observers expressed alarm over the destruction of the National Estate, seen as an indispensable factor of production in sustainable agro-pastoral development. The Government finally adopted the National Land-Use Management Programme on an experimental basis in 1987. This involved the collective, participatory management of lands by local people under the supervision of teams of professionals who act as advisers. Another way of eliminating free access to land and of curbing the destruction of natural resources would have been to privatise land and encourage individuals to invest. However, this perspective could not be contemplated within the ideology of the revolutionary era.

The National Land-use Management Programme (PNGT)

This consisted of drawing up small-scale development projects to enable the resident populations to strengthen their decision-making powers in their localities and control the use of natural resources.

This approach has since been adopted by a large number of projects and is currently being implemented in several hundred villages (Toulmin, 1994). Its success is attributed to concerted land-use restructuring efforts as cited in many case studies (Faure, 1992).

However, this programme remains limited in scope in relation to the 8,000 villages of Burkina Faso and, because of the huge financial investments

involved, would be difficult to replicate at a national level. The PNGT will contribute to settling the land issue, provided it fits in with the ongoing decentralisation policies and is genuinely participatory without becoming an aid programme.

After the Revolution, the Government wanted to encourage capital investment. This led to a revision of the 1984 RAF in order to allow private land ownership.

The 1991 RAF: Private Ownership

Article 1 of the 1991 RAF reaffirms that land constitutes part of the National Estate. However, Article 3 stipulates that: "Lands forming part of the National Estate may be assigned as private property to individuals or legal entities under the conditions set out by *Kiti*.⁵ Lands thus assigned cease to be State property." Nevertheless, the government will control their use.

According to the 1991 RAF, farmers could obtain title deeds through a simple administrative procedure⁶

In principle, the acquisition of a land title guarantees the holder security of tenure; the procedure includes public notification of ownership, so that no-one can come and claim back cultivated lands. Such land can also be mortgaged for the purposes of securing loans. The price of land, as established in the RAF, does not relate to its use, profitability or exchange value on the market but is proportional to its surface area (Article 207).

The provisions of the 1991 RAF avoid the greatest pitfalls: for instance, it is forbidden to accumulate unused lands as a means of generating income.⁷ Of

⁵ *Kiti*, *raabo* and *zatu* are the names given to decrees issued by the revolutionary administration. These terms are still to be found in the text of the 1991 RAF, but should be abolished following the 1994 review.

⁶ The procedures are described in Articles 96 and 101 on permanent land use rights (cultivation permits) and in Articles 104-105 on the assignment of National Estates (DFN) as full private property. The applicant has to pay tax established at 5,000 Francs per hectare. Articles 631 to 636 describe the land registration procedures and Articles 637 to 685 deal with notification procedures. Property rights are guaranteed once the land has been developed in accordance with existing laws.

⁷ Article 101: The issue of title deeds is subject to the certified development of the lands. This legal requirement has been introduced to ward off attempts at accumulating lands for speculative ends.

course, checking that land is actually in use will depend on how zealously the Government carries out the task, as attested by a strange restriction in Article 208.⁸ The Law guards against the eviction of poor farmers who are unable to pay the taxes on the use of rural farmlands: undeveloped land may still be used free of charge⁹ (Dubalet, 1993). The 1991 RAF introduced Village Land-Use Management Committees, new bodies stemming from the land-use management experiment.¹⁰ Although this allows for decentralised management of lands at a village level, the initiative was unfortunately not followed up in the Law of 6th May 1993 on the organisation of territorial administration. This decentralisation law only recognises the provinces and communes as local authorities.

Access to property is based on selective demarcation on a case by case basis; there will be no national cadastral survey. The RAF thus allows for the co-existence of three systems: the public (National Estate), the private and the customary, of which the first two are explicitly recognised in the text, whilst the customary system is considered 'transitional' (Article 708), 'pending the establishment of the Village Land-Use Management Committees.'

The 1994 Review

The RAF was reviewed in August/September 1994 for the purposes of adapting the provisions to the new context where the State is subject to the rule of law and to bring them into line with the new laws ratified by the National Assembly, particularly the environmental code. The RAF will be amended and backed up by enforcement measures adopted at the Cabinet Meeting.

What are the current prospects, when one compares the principles of the RAF with local practices? How can individual interests, which should be satisfied through the acquisition of land titles, be compatible with those of local village inhabitants?

⁸ Article 208: Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 203 above, the State may assign land to public or private legal entities without it being developed beforehand.

⁹ Articles 90 and 91: Undeveloped rural lands may be occupied and utilised free of charge, i.e. without payment of taxes or fees. However, they may be transferred from the National Estate after registration (Article 88).

¹⁰ Articles 106 and 107: The local groups managing lands forming part of the National Estates are the Land Allocation, Evaluation and Withdrawal Commissions, falling within the remit of the Village Land-Use Management Committees.

What kind of institutional land management can one put forward which will be in line with government policies in order to ensure food security, access to land for everybody, sustainable management of natural resources and local development?

III. CURRENT PROSPECTS

The devaluation of the CFA Franc in January 1994 was expected to encourage investment and boost agricultural production and local consumption in Burkina Faso. However, current land practices and policies are so divergent that they do not allow for optimal land management in rural areas.

An operational perspective in addressing the land issue must take into account the administrative and legal framework (laws), the social context (analysing the constraints) and institutional aspects (applicability).

The administrative and legal framework has been described above. It is one of the major obstacles to the enforcement of the law: the 1991 RAF did not provide for any consultation between private entrepreneurs and traditional land authorities.

Land appropriation was simply considered an administrative procedure; the social dimension of the land issue was ignored, as was the economic value of land.

Village Land-Use Management Committees, on the other hand, would constitute an efficient institutional and social base if they existed throughout the country. Their establishment could curb the arbitrary provisions of the customary system (one person having the authority to give access to plots or to take them away) whilst preserving the local legitimacy conferred by security of tenure at village level. Experience shows that whenever members of a CVGT¹¹ actually are elected as the result of a participatory process, in which the Committee's objectives are well understood by the population, the CVGT follows the pattern of local land management institutions, bringing in younger members and broadening their base, e.g. the sons of the village chief, the nephew of the land

¹¹ CVGT: Village Land-Use Management Committee.

priest¹², the child of the official in charge of water or bush affairs, the wife of the Chairman of the village group, etc.

Social constraints: the example of private irrigation schemes

The 1991 RAF was expected to encourage the appropriation of land for private use but what actually happened? We shall consider the case of a socio-economic group in dire need of security of tenure in view of the scale of its investments. In the rural areas of Burkina Faso, the most important private investors, apart from traders, are currently those independent farmers possessing irrigated farmlands.

Private irrigation is defined here as an economic activity which is entirely independent of the State, right from setting up the scheme, to input supply, agricultural extension and through to product marketing¹³.

The schemes are set up by the landowner at less than half the cost of State schemes (before the devaluation of the CFA Franc, development costs per hectare were estimated at 2 to 3 million CFA Francs for private and 6 million CFA Francs for State schemes). Each scheme covers an area of 20 to 30 hectares although some owners have up to 100 hectares spread over several widely-separated sites. Considerable funds are mobilised, as the start-up investment for 25 ha is about 75 million CFA Francs (before devaluation) whilst the investment for each cultivation season for French (green) beans for the same area is around 30 million CFA Francs.

There are about ten such agricultural entrepreneurs in Burkina Faso, all of whom are highly trained engineers. Most had been senior figures within the government administration but the unrest during the revolutionary years made them change direction and set up their own businesses. The main crop is French (green) beans, the bulk of which is exported to France. Irrigated tree cropping, particularly bananas, also provides an appreciable income on the local market: one well-developed hectare can easily fetch in more than 1 million CFA Francs each year. The entrepreneurs control all aspects of the sector, from on-farm

¹² In Western Burkina, the Land Priest has a religious role and access to land involves a symbolic gift to this individual (chickens, kola nuts, money).

¹³ This definition does not, therefore, take into account the privatisation of areas developed by the State. The State is now seeking to put forward a variety of contractual arrangements whereby farmers would take over and manage State lands in line with appropriate financial procedures.

production to export of the produce. The difficulty lies in controlling sales in Rungis, France, which is the sole destination for the time being, and only one or two Burkina Faso exporters have so far succeeded in this (Faure, 1994).

Table of farming and export enterprises (non exhaustive list)

ENTERPRISE	SITE	AREA	TOTAL*
FLEX FASO (Semi-public company being privatized)	1. Bazega 2. Kou Valley 3. La Guénako 4. La Tapoa	36 ha 30 ha 100 ha 10 ha	176 ha (operating difficulties due to the use of obsolete equipment)
SKOFA (Private Export Company)	1. Lac Bam 2. Yatenga 3. Savili 4. Komienga	Darigma 12 ha, Koulpellé 12 ha Gouinré 10 ha 32 ha 11 ha	70 to 120ha
PICKOU (Private Export Company)	Lake Dem	90 ha	90 ha (only 30 ha developed in 1994)
FASO FRUITS (Private Export Company)	1. Lac Bam 2. Badara	Bam 17 ha, Kora 20 ha, Badingo 7 ha 22 ha (bananas)	66 ha
Zimtanga (Independent farmer)	Lac Bam	Zimtanga 14 ha, Batenga 14 ha, Bargo 13 ha Badnogó 9 ha	50 ha
PACO (Private Export Company)	1. Toécé (Bazéga) 2. Lake Sian 3. Gomboussougou	13 ha 4 ha 7 ha	24 ha
DEFI (Private Export Company)	Yabasso	20 ha	20 ha

* The entire scheme area may not be used every year.

The scale of these activities shows how necessary it is to provide security of

tenure to ensure optimal management of investments in private irrigation ventures. Returns must be generated regularly to pay back loans.

However, few of the private irrigated farming enterprises have land titles. Only two of the seven entrepreneurs mentioned in the table above have land titles, which they acquired before the 1983 Revolution. However, they do not think that their titles guarantee them security of tenure, as witnessed by the mishap that befell one of them in 1994. He possessed a 15 hectare French (green) bean farm beside Lake Bam but, following some misunderstanding between the landowners, he was suddenly obliged to stop working the land despite holding title to it and having operated there for ten years. This is not a unique case and tree-croppers are not spared either. One banana producer at Orodara, a retired civil servant who established his farm 15 years ago, was ordered this year by the landowner to give back the land.

The tenure issue, therefore, poses problems for entrepreneurs investing in rural areas but it is not their prime concern. If they do not originate from the village where they farm, owners of private schemes have integrated this lack of security of tenure into the way they farm. They operate a kind of shifting cultivation with the help of mobile equipment. Those rural entrepreneurs, however, who belong to the landowners' clans can set up their schemes on a more permanent basis, constructing irrigation reservoirs, underground pipelines, etc.

These farming and export entrepreneurs put forward another argument to explain why acquiring a property title is not a high priority: banks do not recognise land titles to farms or rural land as collateral and land titles do not authorise investors to secure bank loans in spite of the written provisions of the RAF.¹⁴ Their first concern is to obtain funds for investment in technical improvements (construction of reservoirs to regulate the water flow of rivers, purchase of submersible pumps, drip-feed mechanisms, etc.) as well as seasonal credit¹⁵ so that they do not depend too much on their European customers. In other words, the rural land market is not sufficiently developed for a land title to act as an asset suitable as collateral for a bank loan.

¹⁴ Articles 102 and 103 of the 1991 Reforms stipulate that: 'any holder of one of the titles to lands forming part of the National Estate (...) may use it to secure loans in the form of money or any other bonds'. 'The proceeds of such loans or other bonds shall exclusively be devoted to the development of the land concerned.'

¹⁵ Loans contracted before the growing season which must be paid back after the last harvests of the season (usually six months).

The entrepreneurs deal with land issues on a social basis: it is essential to maintain good relations in the village, particularly with the local traditional authorities and 'landowners' who authorised them to set up their schemes. Investors seek to rationalise their economic activities by reducing the risks posed by social constraints.

What is the impact of their farming activities on local development? Some farming and export enterprises pay their farm workers with commendable regularity (SKOFA, Faso Fruits and PACO). But this is not true of all of them and the major difficulty facing farm workers lies in gaining returns for their labour. For example, the farms beside Lake Dem can produce 600 of the 4,000 tonnes of French (green) beans exported from the country every season but the workers only received full payment during the first two years of activity.¹⁶ Worse still, the income from the 'green gold' does not benefit the people living near the lakes who still lack any social infrastructure. In the Lake Dem area, for instance, the produce could generate gross sales of several million CFA Francs, after devaluation. Yet the villages here have neither schools, dispensaries nor boreholes. Sometimes, the Sahelian residents around Lakes Dem and Bam gain no other benefit than being able to remain in work in their locality during the dry season, rather than emigrating to the Ivory Coast. Furthermore, the environment is the least of the farm workers' concerns as they have little knowledge in this field. Pump irrigation from permanent rivers in the west leads to cutting of riverine forest and consequent damage to the river banks. Moreover, water used for market gardening is sometimes drawn from polluted canals.

How can one reconcile the preservation of the environment and improved living conditions for the rural population in a sustainable manner with the security of tenure required by investors?

The institutional framework partly exists in Burkina Faso, together with general policy declarations concerning territorial administration and decentralised management. However, the country lacks intermediate bodies and certain formal instruments which would allow the implementation of policy ideas.

¹⁶ Individual trading accounts indicate that, after twenty weeks of intensive gardening, a farmer tilling about 100 square metres of land receives barely more than 25,000 CFA Francs. Additional income in the form of foodstuffs is obtained from maize cultivated as windbreaks around the plots, enabling farmers to endure the hardships of the dry season in this harsh environment.

The transition from customary control to administrative, democratic and decentralised control

The land constraints encountered by private irrigated farming enterprises show that acquiring a land title cannot solve their problem, unless the title deed is backed by the landowners' mutual recognition of their permanent right to develop these low-lying lands.

The arbitrary nature of customary institutions still influences land issues (access to land and withdrawal of it, etc.) in spite of successive attempts to reduce their power by means of decrees and through the experience of direct democracy during the 1983-87 revolution.

The progressive rebuilding of a civilian society in Burkina Faso within the framework of the 1991 Constitution should help transform their power on a long-term basis. On 6th May 1993, the National Assembly passed a Law on Territorial Administration that provided for the election of mayors in the communes (administrative districts). These mayors are responsible for the decentralised and democratic management of public affairs but they are remote from the electors, as only a maximum of 108 communes are envisaged to manage the 8,000 villages in Burkina Faso (only 33 fully-fledged communes elected a mayor in February 1995). This form of decentralisation can only be described as cautious.

Moreover, nothing today suggests that the experience of the Village Land-Use Management Committees will be replicated at a national level in spite of the specific provisions of the RAF. However, there are many positive aspects. As with the land-use plans tried out in the Ivory Coast, the village management plans drawn up within land-use management projects have enabled producers to acquire some comprehensive knowledge on land use, which has allowed them to consider a more rational means of developing their lands. Maps and diagrams form valuable discussion tools which enable joint decisions to be taken in respect of land allocation.

There are no institutions which support the Village Management Committees to address land issues effectively throughout the national territory. To increase their efficiency, committees or other bodies representing a village or group of villages must operate within a framework of participatory negotiation between structures established by modern law (estate management authority entrusted with registration of land titles) and local leaders. This framework would include the administration, technical services, elected representatives and private

operators to allow land issues to be resolved in a spirit of collective responsibility and shared decision-making.

Limitations of the current law on decentralisation

With the present status of the law on decentralisation, local authorities cannot handle land issues, as the relevant legislation was formulated from a centralist perspective. The study on land issues conducted by SERA indicated that: 'The excessive monopoly of land ownership and management by the State could be mitigated if the State empowered the local communities to manage land-use. Such a measure could increase management efficiency in authorities who are more in touch with actual conditions in the field. Thus, the rights which these local authorities would exercise in respect of lands forming part of the National Estate would be in the name and on behalf of the State' (SERA, 1994). However, as noted earlier, under the Law of 6th May 1993 only the provinces and communes have the status of local authorities. Villages and 'départements' (counties) are merely administrative divisions (constituencies) with no legal status.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, even though there is a legal framework in Burkina Faso which could provide all producers, small-scale farmers and private investors with security of tenure, it is not used. Current practices indicate that a legal solution to the land issue is contingent upon social recognition of land acquisition by the local village inhabitants.

Consequently, to provide security of tenure for private investors on their schemes one must strengthen the role of the grassroots communities in land-use management.

However, further institutional developments are required in order to reconcile the local, overall, social and legal dimensions of land tenure, as well as the requirements for food production and investments in cash crop production, in order to implement national policy decisions and remove obstacles to decentralised management.

Once the mayors of the communes have been democratically elected, the development of a civilian society should come a step nearer the local level (rural

communes). There is also a need for decentralised consultative bodies to deal with land-use, involving all the various actors, without whom it will be impossible to embark upon any sustainable development initiative. The aim is to initiate a dynamic local process geared towards acknowledging and resolving land tenure issues. Use of village plans, handled by the Village Land-Use Management Committees, could be an efficient tool for participatory management but this possibility has not yet been considered. These Committees should be established nationwide and should be granted legal status.

The institutional framework proposed in this paper to foster security of tenure and investment in rural areas, and which is based directly on current experience in Burkina Faso, is far from advocating the principle of outright ownership in the Roman legal sense of *jus, usus et abutendi*. On the contrary, it seeks to maintain villagers' participation in local management together with State technical services so as to ensure the concerted development of land and natural resources.

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