

THE EU AND ITS ROLE IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE MDGs: THE LINKAGES WITH EC SUPPORT TO LAND POLICY AND REFORM INTERVENTIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Opening remarks

Where do we stand, as EC, in the overall accomplishment of the MDGs

In 2000, 189 UN Members agreed on the well known eight Millennium Development Goals aimed at eradicating poverty, promoting human and social development and ensuring environmentally sustainable development across the globe.

Since then, some encouraging progress has been made. But much remains to be done. Sub-Saharan Africa still faces huge difficulties, with the highest proportion of people (over 40%) living on below \$1 a day. Asia and Latin America are performing better, but large inequalities persist within and between countries.

As a global partner with political and social values, the EU has taken the lead in supporting developing countries efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and has stressed the need of acting better and faster for the whole international community.

The efforts made so far by the EU:

- the EU is the largest donor worldwide with an EU aid effort close to €100 per citizen in official development aid every year (€46 billion committed by Member States and the Commission combined). This level of investment has contributed to the overall reduction in global poverty as illustrated by the 18% decrease between 1999 and 2004, in the percentage of the population in developing regions living on less than \$1 each day; the 24% increase in the net enrolment ratio in primary education between 1999 and 2005 in Least Developed Countries; or the 27% decrease from 2001 and 2005 in the percentage of urban population living in slums in Southern Asia.
- The EU countries and the Commission now share **common vision, goals and values** for development since 2005 with the **European Consensus on development** – a Declaration signed by EU Heads of States in 2005.

- Development is not only a matter of quantity but also of quality. A series of reforms were undertaken to improve the **effectiveness of aid**. Among them, an EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labour adopted in 2007 to encourage donors to join forces, avoid duplication.
- The EU decided to pay specific attention to the effects of its trade, agriculture, migration, research and environmental policies – just to name five out of the twelve areas identified – on developing countries and issued a first report on **Policy Coherence for Development** in September 2007. The Communication promotes a common vision for ambitious results on the Millennium Development Goals, aid effectiveness and financing for development.
- Following the release at the beginning of this month of the OECD development aid figures, the Commission urged on 9 April 2008 Member States to go beyond rhetoric and deliver on their commitments. In its Communication "EU as a global partner for development", the Commission proposes a number of actions for Member States to increase the volume and the effectiveness of aid as well as areas where EU policies could be better coordinated. The Communication provides a new systematic overview of EU collective action in support of the MDGs and draws recommendations for doing more and better.

With seven years remaining, the message for 2008 is that the Millennium Development Goals can still be achieved, but for this to happen, increased political and public support will be needed. Without Development, problems will remain: Migration, Security, Climate Change.

The EU will continue to lead world efforts for Development while seeking fair burden sharing with other developed and emerging partners for a fair globalisation.

And the EC recognises that the Importance of Land and Resource Rights in Achieving the MDGs should not be underestimated

Three quarters of the world's poor – approximately 900 million people – live in rural areas and depend on access to land and other natural resources for their livelihoods. In order to halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one Dollar a day and suffer from hunger, as set out in the first goal of the MDGs, access to land for the rural poor and landless must be at the center of national and international policies. Access to land and secure rights over natural resources are fundamentally linked to the three pillars necessary for achieving the MDGs, which are Development, Human rights and Security.

To the first pillar of "Development"

Secure access to land when linked with access to the productive factors of credit, technical support and markets, is fundamental for poor families to contribute to, and benefit from, national development.

To the second pillar of "Human Rights"

Improved access to land and respect for the land rights of the poor is a starting point in establishing respect for human rights, including equal rights of women and the rights of indigenous peoples.

To the third pillar of "Security"

Around the world conflicts are linked to the use and control of land and other natural resources. These conflicts constrain economic opportunities, create environmental damage and, at their most extreme, lead to loss of human life. Poor households and communities all too often bear the heaviest burdens of land-related conflicts.

Furthermore land issues are strongly linked to the achievement of almost all the MDGs.

3. Access to land and productive resources, what has been done, and what is going on at EC level on land issues?

An increasingly large number of developing countries are involved in reviewing their land policies and designing land and agrarian reforms. This has coincided with a substantive theoretical reconsideration of "traditional" approaches to reform of land tenure systems.

We all know that **land tenure is a complex issue** comprising political, economic, technical, legal and institutional factors. Control over land forms a significant part of the identity and maintenance of rural society. Land policies determine who has legal rights of access and/or ownership to certain resources and under what conditions, and therefore how these productive assets are distributed among diverse stakeholders.

Land policies therefore express, implicitly or explicitly, **the political choices** made concerning the distribution of power between the state, its citizens, and local systems of authority. The multiple dimensions to land issues require a careful and well-implemented approach which places current land issues within the broader historical, political economic and social context.

Political ownership, willingness and commitment are therefore key factors for the definition and implementation of effective land policies and/or land reforms. Land reforms

often reflect political compromises between various objectives and interest groups. It is the responsibility of national governments interacting with civil society to make their own land policy choices and craft feasible and effective solutions.

Donor engagement with land reform and land policy has changed over time. In the 1940s and 1950 in East Asia, and in the 1960s and 70s in Latin America, agrarian reforms were supported as a means of defusing radical pressures for political change. The political character and complexity of such interventions has led many donors to withdraw from supporting land redistribution.

However growing land scarcity and concern about land-related conflicts and rising levels of rural impoverishment, especially in Africa, have brought land to the fore once more. This growing interest ties in well with the focus on designing an effective policy framework, and promoting good governance, decentralisation, and democratic institutions at local and national levels. At the same time, recent years have generated a body of experience with new forms of intervention in land administration which has demonstrated the need for and feasibility of designing diverse types of interventions to suit a range of different settings.

3a. The EC/EU Land Policy framework

From the policy side, in 1999 the European Commission substantially overhauled its development policy to re-centre it around the objective of poverty reduction. From this overall policy framework several sectoral policies have been reviewed since.

Last in this endeavour, the rural development policy was reviewed in 2002. This exercise, carried out jointly by the EC with the Member States, led to the finalisation of a Communication¹ on 25/7/02 “Fighting Rural Poverty: The EC policy and approach to rural development and sustainable natural resource management in developing countries”, which was warmly received in the Council.

It signalled the increasing attention being paid by European development co-operation to rural areas and the complex set of issues which determine rural livelihoods. In the discussions which followed the release of the Communication, land issues came out insistently as one of the fields where greater harmonisation of donor policies and approaches would considerably help to improve the effectiveness of donor funding in support of national processes.

¹ COM (2002)429 final of 25/7/02 “Fighting Rural Poverty: The EC policy and approach to rural development and sustainable natural resource management in developing countries”

As a result **EU Heads of Rural Development** have strongly encouraged the drafting of land policy guidelines with the aim of sharing a common document. In February 2002, an EU Task Force was set up with the objective of drafting and validating these guidelines. The work was carried out in 2002 and 2003 and completed by an internet consultation in order to gather stakeholders' views.

The political significance of the overall exercise- particularly in terms of successful EU coordination/harmonisation in view of shaping a common practical reference framework for interventions in developing countries over rural land has also been emphasized by the EU Council of Ministers in 2004.

The EU Guidelines as a Framework for Improved Land Policies

The EU land policy guidelines provide policy advice and operational guidelines for EU donors to support the design and implementation of land policy and administration in developing countries. They are meant for field and head-quarters staff directly or indirectly involved with land issues and land reform programmes in primarily rural (but also urban) areas: development advisers, land administration specialists, fiscal or decentralisation advisers, policy advisers, etc.

Sharing a common understanding of key issues in land policy design and implementation, shall improve coordination between EU member states and the Commission and between the EU and other donors and facilitate common support to a national programme and will result in greater effectiveness of development cooperation interventions.

The guidelines review the main policy trends, processes and reform options in part 1 and in part 2 provide a set of operational guidelines to help assessing the situation in a given country and define the key elements of a response strategy.

According to the guidelines the objective that a land policy should pursue in Developing Countries is: "*The establishment of a land tenure system which can sustainably improve the equitable access to, and governance of, land and natural resources*". To support improvements in agricultural productivity and, ultimately food security, such system:

- i) must take into account the traditional overlapping land use rights,
- ii) must be established through a participatory reform process, and
- iii) should be managed at the lowest possible level.

For a reform to be effective and pro-poor a number of **constraints** need to be addressed, it has to comply with some basic principles.

Land reforms alone will not achieve their objectives if they are not flanked by appropriate **accompanying measures** necessary to ensure their impact.

Substantial **capacity building and training** is necessary to reinforce local and central institutions responsible for implementing the reform and to ensure that inventories and registrations are efficient and fast.

Infrastructure development must accompany land reform if transport and communications have to develop according to market demand.

Land tax. A pro-poor taxation system should be introduced which provides incentives to environmentally sound and efficient utilisation of land.

Social security and insurance systems. There may be a need to devise a social security and/or an insurance system to replace traditional ones and cover climate related risks.

Furthermore the EU guidelines provide recommendations on various important inter-related cross-cutting policy and governance issues.

We feel that **titling programs should develop out of a real need** – most likely present where population density is high and land transactions are increasing – rather than as a means to stimulate rural land markets.

Resource scarcity and unequal distribution of access to these resources can also lead to **tensions and increased risk of violent conflicts**. Conflicts resolution has therefore become an integral part in the current re-thinking of natural resources management for development through new tools such as decentralisation and participatory processes. Both imply wider and genuine stakeholder involvement so to proactively anticipate potential conflicts of interests as to how resources are to be managed.

Finally the guidelines identify numerous **implementation challenges** – access to information and legal assistance, cost of services, conflict resolution capacity, access to credit and financial services, access to markets, infrastructure, etc. – must also accompany land reform efforts in order for poor households to benefit.

3b. EC Support at the global level, the regional and country level

Programmes supported by the EC at the global level include programmes with the **International Land Coalition**, and the **Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor**.

At the regional level the EU supports land policy harmonisation in Africa through the EU partnership with the AUC and at the country level the EC has started to support initiatives in for example Namibia and Bangladesh. These examples of EC interventions should be considered within the overall EU policy approach to land issues in developing countries, and are relevant experiences focussing on international advocacy work on land. They are supported by the EC particularly because they provide an overall consistent international framework for promoting and structuring dialogue on land issues with interested developing countries.

4. Conclusion

It is clear that land issues are politically highly sensitive as they require wide ranging and sometimes controversial political decisions, we are convinced however that most of the political sensitivity attached to land reform can be neutralised through transparent and participatory processes provided there is a genuine willingness in Government to reach an equitable, stable, effective and sustainable outcome.

The Council Conclusions adopted on the Land Guidelines emphasis the importance of ensuring ownership and participation by local stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of land policy reform processes and the role donors must play in promoting and accompanying such processes, as well as the importance of good governance for the development of adequate regulatory frameworks and land tenure management systems in order to secure land rights.

Sharing a common understanding of key issues in land policy design and implementation, will improve coordination between EU member states and the Commission and between the EU and other donors and will facilitate common support to a Government programme and will result in greater effectiveness of cooperation programmes.

On behalf of Commissioner Michel, I wish you a very successful Conference which I'm sure will help to further bringing together Governments, civil society and the international development partners in clearly identifying and agreeing on a common course of action particularly in land reform processes in developing countries.