Towards a national land policy in Niger

The success of the États généraux: a participatory and inclusive process that triggered synergies
The project Sécurisation des systèmes fonciers pastoraux au Niger par le renforcement de la gouvernance foncière (PSSFP-RGF) funded by the European Union, provided substantial support to the coordination and preparation of the "États généraux du foncier rural". The land tenure forum took place in Niamey from 13 to 16 February 2019 with the aim of taking stock on the tenure situation in the country. It led to a consensus of the need to elaborate a visionary land policy inspired by the fundamental governance principles defined in The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) and in the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa (F&G).

The preparation process of the États généraux commenced in October 2014 after the decision of the National Committee of the Rural Code to organize the event, under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Niger. This process was highly participatory, involving all the actors of the various sectors and regions of the country during regional preparatory workshops, allowing in depth discussions on the land tenure situation in the country.

The success of the États généraux is partly due to the willingness of a broad range of actors to create synergies and coordinate their activities. The main technical and financial partners who have supported this approach are: the Italian Cooperation, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the European Union, the Belgian Cooperation, the Swiss Cooperation, the German Cooperation (ProMAP/GIZ), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, UN Women, COSPE ONLUS and OXFAM.

Most of these partners met on a monthly basis to coordinate their support to the multi-stakeholder committee responsible for the process of preparing the États généraux.

The États généraux, gathering more than 300 participants from all sectors and regions of the country, was one of the largest platforms for exchange between actors ever mobilized in the sub-region. It provided a forum to openly discuss the Rural Code in Niger, its implementation over the last 25 years and its contribution to food and nutrition security and agricultural development.
SUCCESS FACTORS

The key success factors of the PSSFP-RGF approach in the preparation process of the États généraux were:

- The systematic approach of its support: before, during and after the États généraux;
- The target groups identified: the traditional chiefs and national deputies (important for the legitimization and scope of the land policy process);
- Inclusion and active participation of the regional representatives to make the process relevant to local concerns and specificities;
- The building of synergy and complementarity with other partners mobilized as part of the co-construction of a dynamic group of 15 technical and financial partners working together to support the national process.

MAIN RESULTS

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<th>Data on pastoral resources are secured in a national database</th>
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<td>A land development plan is adopted</td>
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<td>30 customary chiefs and 35 members of parliament informed and sensitized on the Rural Code of Niger, VGGT and F&amp;G</td>
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Informed Participation and Mobilization of Key Actors

The PSSFP-RGF project contributed to the preparation, organization and implementation of the recommendations resulted from the États généraux, with the objective to strengthen land governance to secure rural workers, especially pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.

The support of the project has in particular contributed to: i) Discussions around a stocktaking of the tenure situation in Niger; ii) Strengthening of capacities on the use of the VGGT and F&G to ensure an informed and effective participation of all relevant actors in the États généraux.

Two key stakeholder groups were successfully targeted by the project. The first group was comprised of traditional leaders, who are guarantors of customary land rights and legitimate rights and hold conciliation power to resolve rural land disputes. The second group was comprised of national deputies, who are representatives of the people and hold power through their responsibility of voting on laws, which are fundamental instruments for the implementation of the future land policy.

The project also helped to improve the inclusion of actors at the États généraux, through support to the participation of delegations from several regions of Niger, invited to present their concerns and suggestions. The mobilization of international experts to share experiences with land policy formulation and to sensitize participants to regional and international instruments, such as the VGGT and F&G was supported by PSSFP-RGF.

Lastly, to ensure the sustainability of the national process, the PSSFP-RGF also supported the finalization of the report that came out of the États généraux with the objective to disseminate the results of the forum.
Most of Niger’s population lives in rural areas. Access to natural resources remains a primary source of food and income. With recurring droughts and demographic pressure, Niger today faces increasingly frequent and violent conflicts between the rural population, particularly between farmers and pastoralists. These conflicts cause serious social problems: they suspend or destroy income opportunities, increase food insecurity, damage the environment, and cause clashes and assaults, sometimes leading to death. With the objective to improve the situation, in 1993, Niger adopted a legal and institutional system, the Rural Code. It is based on a decade of consultations and its main objective was to secure tenure for the rural population and to prevent conflicts.
The European Union Land Governance Programme supports efforts to secure tenure rights to land, fisheries and forests in 18 individual country-level projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America. All projects address country-specific tenure issues and are implemented by various implementing partners, including government agencies, civil society organizations, bilateral and multilateral organizations and private sector companies.

All project activities are carried out within the framework of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) and, in the African context, the African Union Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges in Africa (AU Declaration) and its Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa (F&G).