

Land consolidation and rural development policies and programmes

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Introduction

The series of the Prague regional workshops on land consolidation have been important in improving the understanding of land consolidation as a tool of rural development. The workshops have been sponsored and organized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The theme for the 2007 workshop is the European Union Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and its application to land consolidation.

This year has seen the introduction of new instruments for rural development for the EU member states, for candidate and potential candidate countries, and European neighbourhood countries. To various degrees, these instruments include measures related to land consolidation.

FAO's work in support of land consolidation is in the context of its overall mandate to alleviate food insecurity and poverty, and to improve rural conditions. FAO's role is to support its member nations by providing advice to governments, development assistance, information, and a neutral forum. The Prague regional workshops have been an important vehicle to enable FAO to play its role.

Land consolidation and rural development

Land reform has been an integral part of the political, social and economic restructuring of the countries that embarked on a transition from centrally planned economies. The focus in the 1990s was on what may be called the "first wave" of land reform: privatization and restitution, and the development of land administration (primarily land registration and cadastre) and land markets.

As countries progressed along their transition paths, a "second wave" of land reform has emerged; one element of this new set of reforms is land consolidation. There is now widespread consensus of the role of land consolidation in addressing fragmentation of land parcels and allowing farmers to increase the size of their parcels and holdings. Through such improvements, land consolidation can contribute to increased agricultural production, lower production costs, and improved quality. Land consolidation is also being used to support broader rural development goals. Land consolidation projects can act as a catalyst and bring in improvements, such as the rehabilitation of rural roads and irrigation and drainage systems, which might otherwise not occur. Land consolidation may also be part of efforts to improve environmental protection, for example through projects to protect and restore water resources or to convert agriculturally inferior land into forest lands.

FAO, together with its partners, has been implementing a multi-year programme to assist countries to use land consolidation as a tool for rural development. This programme comprises three interrelated components:

- a series of workshops – the Czech Ministry of Agriculture has been an important partner to FAO, and has supported four workshops in Prague (2002, 2005, 2006 and 2007);
- a series of technical publications; and
- technical projects.

Land consolidation workshops of FAO and its partners

- 2002 Munich Symposium
- 2002 Rome Workshop
- 2002 Prague Regional Workshop
- 2004 Tonder Workshop
- 2005 Prague Regional Workshop
- 2006 Prague Regional Workshop
- 2007 Prague Regional Workshop

Land consolidation and related documents prepared by FAO together with its partners

- “The design of land consolidation pilot projects in Central and Eastern Europe” (FAO Land Tenure Studies 6)
- “Operational manual for land consolidation pilot projects in Central and Eastern Europe” (FAO Land Tenure Manuals 1)
- “FAO land tenure training materials on land consolidation pilot projects”
- “Good practice guidelines to agricultural leasing arrangements” (FAO Land Tenure Studies 2)
- “Leasing agricultural land” (FAO Land Tenure Notes 1)
- “A short introduction to microregional planning”
- “Rural development policies and programmes of the European Union and their effects on land consolidation” (FAO Land Tenure Policy Series)

Electronic versions of some FAO documents on land tenure can be obtained from:

http://www.fao.org/sd/IN1_en.htm

http://www.fao.org/sd/LTdirect/ltstudies_en.htm

http://www.fao.org/regional/seur/MRP_en.pdf

The papers and presentations of the 2005 and 2006 Prague Regional Workshops on Land Consolidation can be obtained from:

http://www.fao.org/regional/seur/events/landcons/landcons_en.htm

http://www.fao.org/regional/seur/events/landcons2/landcons_en.htm

Early workshops defined the need for guidelines on how to start land consolidation. Such guidelines were prepared and disseminated at later workshops.

The guidelines were used by several countries to implement pilot projects and develop strategies for land consolidation, and the experiences of these projects was documented for use in other countries.

When introducing land consolidation, it is important that countries adopt approaches that are appropriate for their own conditions. FAO has recommended that countries consider options that include voluntary participation when resources are low and when there is considerable distrust between citizens and their governments because of a history of coercion.

The workshops have provided a forum for specialists from different countries to meet one another and to develop a peer network. The 2005 Prague workshop had as its theme: “Getting started with land consolidation pilot projects”. For 2006, the workshop concentrated on: “Building capacity to expand work in land consolidation beyond pilot projects”. At the 2006 workshop there was interest in learning more about the EU’s Rural Development Programme and its effects on land consolidation.

Land consolidation and the EU's RDP 2007-13

In response, and with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic, a workshop was planned for 2007 to provide a forum for countries to discuss their experiences, and to learn more about the Rural Development Programme for 2007-13. A complementary response is the preparation of new policy guidelines on the rural development policies and programmes and their effects on land consolidation. This new policy paper provides an overview of the new instruments introduced for the planning period of 2007-13: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for EU member states; the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for candidate and potential candidate countries (a difference being that candidate countries are eligible for IPARD, or the rural development component of IPA); and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for European Neighbourhood countries.

An important message of the policy paper is that in order for countries to obtain co-financing from the EU for land consolidation, they must ensure that land consolidation is identified as a priority in all relevant planning documents, strategic documents and agreements with the EU. This opportunity should not be missed if countries wish to open the door for co-financing of land consolidation activities.