

LAND CONSOLIDATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Land Consolidation Strategy in the Republic of Serbia has been prepared in order to be proposed to the Government for adoption, in accordance with the Rural Development Strategy of Serbia and the Agricultural Land Act, basic objectives of the new land consolidation policy, to identify priorities of the land consolidation development and approve the programme on establishing appropriate instruments that shall provide implementation of key priorities in regulating, protection and use of agricultural land in Serbia. The basic premise of identifying objectives, priorities and appropriate instruments is based on political determination of the country to carry out rational harmonization of the rural development and improvement of the quality of life in rural areas.

The Land Strategy in the Republic of Serbia has come out as a result of the joint work of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, local experts hired by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations within the **FAO Project SUPPORT TO THE PREPARATION OF A NATIONAL LAND CONSOLIDATION STRATEGY AND A LAND CONSOLIDATION PILOT PROJECT IN SERBIA, No.TCP/YUG/3001 (A).**

The rural development and community area development plan should be treated integrally with the rural area arrangement, which presents the main resource of rural settlements. It is particularly important due to expected changes in the rural economic structure and development of non-agricultural activities, bearing in mind that the village agricultural potential must not be imperiled. For this reason, it is necessary to:

- give priority to land consolidation and grouping-up of family households which are permanently focused to agricultural production;
- adjust production structure to market requirements, natural conditions, labour potentials in a rural area, available machinery, etc;
- protect agricultural land from negative impact of other economic and non-economic activities, which shall develop in rural areas;
- develop new activities (cultural, utility, recreational, social, etc.) and raise standard in village.

There is strong connection between the rural and agricultural policies, and therefore achieving the policy objectives in one field shall depend to great extent on success in the other. Actually, as much as successful agricultural sector contributes to the rural area development through local income and expenditures and creating employment possibilities, so the rural economy shall successfully provide employment for labour surplus in agriculture.

With existing average holding size in Serbia of 2.7 hectares, only small number of them has prerequisites to be competitive. Creation of commercial households' structure meeting the modern market-economy requirements is imposed as a strategic objective priority. All possibilities leading to

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grouping up of family commercial holdings, particularly creation of the land consolidation programme, must be stimulated by the agrarian policy measures.

The National Strategy for Land Consolidation was finalized and presented to the public by the the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and FAO team, in october 2007 and it is still waiting to be adopted by the Government. Due to the political situation in the country and new elections it is hard to predict when we can expect this to happen.

2. NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR LAND CONSOLIDATION

The land consolidation strategy is based on five basic **principles** established at the beginning of preparation of this document, and they are as follows:

- Applicability;
- Flexibility;
- Economic feasibility;
- Continuity principle in rural development;
- Harmonization principle;

The general objective of the Strategy is to develop the concept of initiation and realization of the land consolidation process at national level in the new conditions.

Individual objectives of the Strategy are:

- The Strategy should identify and define more models that are applicable;
- Defining and adjustment of legal and organizational measures as necessary requirements for applying the land consolidation model.
- Defining of entities in the land consolidation process and establishment of the responsibility principle.
- Defining long-term and short-term priorities and realization schedule in the land consolidation process.
- Planning of the financial resources and their allocation.

Main obstacles and limitations that have influence on proposals stated in the Land Consolidation Strategy can be defined in the following eight items:

- Lack of financial resources at national level;
- Lack of confidence in the system institutions;
- Undeveloped agricultural land market;
- Lack of motivation and initiative;
- Lack of qualified personnel for carrying out land consolidation;
- Insufficient informing and lack of understanding the land consolidation process;
- Lack of accurate records on real estates;
- Non-enactment of the Restitution Act;

Land consolidation is a very successful instrument that can be used for rural development and as such it should provide:

- Improvement of rural living conditions and not only the improvement of primary agricultural production
- Renewal of villages by permanent economic and political development of the community and the protection and permanent management of natural resources
- Active and democratic participation

- Assistance to villages in order to define the new use of community resources and appropriate spatial rearrangement
- Connection between the elements of rural development and the elements of wider regional development including connections between rural and urban areas

Three consolidation models that are most appropriate for our conditions and needs will be considered within this Strategy. These consolidation models are based on the abovementioned contemporary principles of land consolidation:

- Comprehensive compulsory consolidation.
- Consolidation as part of an investment project
- Simple voluntary consolidation.

Which of these three models will be applied in a specific situation depends on the given requirements and restrictions. For each of these models to be successfully implemented it is necessary that it be based on the new concept that involves a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach and the fusion of elements of agricultural development and rural development. Development plans on the local level and plans for the use of land should serve as a basis for land consolidation. Consolidation should and must provide that a democratic principle is applied regarding the participation of all stakeholders. It must be ruled by mutual interests. The basic elements of a new concept for proposed land consolidation models in Serbia should be:

- Distribution of responsibilities.
- Beneficiaries' participation.
- Land consolidation as the sale and purchase of land.
- Connecting land consolidation with rural development.
- Connecting land consolidation with restitution and privatization.
- Connecting land consolidation with land registration

Recognizing key elements of a new land consolidation concept, each consolidation model should be comprised of four phases:

- Preparatory phase
- Decision-making phase
- Negotiations and planning phase
- Implementation phase

In order to successfully implement land consolidation it is very important to establish division of responsibilities between participants. Very important for implementation process is the question - who will have full responsibility for land consolidation. In the Strategy for Land Consolidation in the Republic of Serbia, it is recommended that full legal responsibility and leading role should have Agriculture Land Administration (organization formed by the Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water management). In the following scheme, the proposal of organization between key participants, from republic level, local level, beneficiaries and Organization for land consolidation implementation is presented.

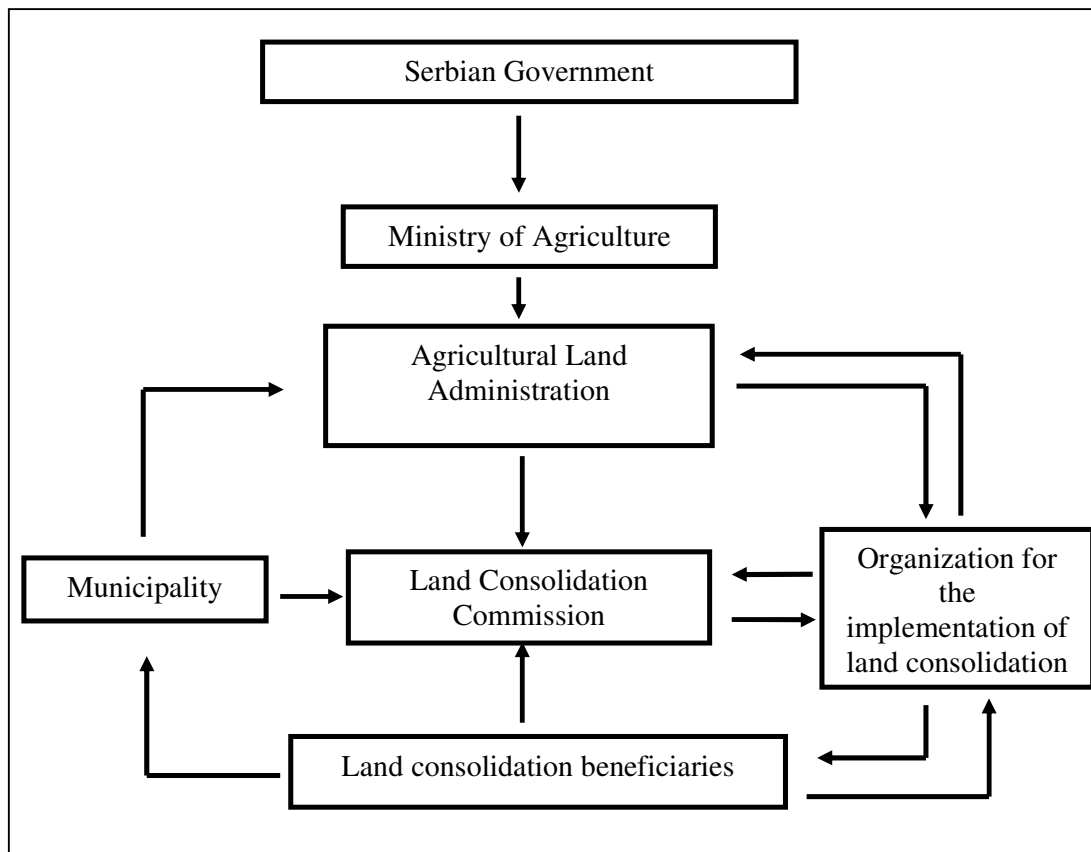


Figure 1: Organizational chart of land consolidation

3. CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Realization of the FAO Pilot Project for Land Consolidation (TCP/YUG/3001) in Serbia had three main objectives:

- Preparation of the Proposal for the national strategy for land consolidation.
- Realization of the land consolidation pilot project.
- Capacity building for the land consolidation implementation.

National Strategy for Land Consolidation was prepared and new model of voluntary land consolidation was implemented in the pilot community. The third objective related to the capacity building for the land consolidation implementation has a follow up and these are important current activities.

In particular, having taken into consideration the on-going educational reform at University of Belgrade as well as the new Higher Education Law and changes in the society in general, it has been decided that it is of great importance for the university to develop a new Master programme in Land Law and Economy based on the current undergraduate programmes in geodesy and geoinformatics, etc. The programme shall pay attention to legal and economic questions especially related to land consolidation and urban/suburban land development. It will be the first MSc programme in Land Law and Economy of the Balkan region developed in accordance with the Bologna declaration. It will last two years. At present the Faculty of Civil Engineering experiences a serious lack of young teaching staff and, therefore, in order to meet growing interest of future students, training of teaching staff is of great demand for the University. Development of this Master Program was initiated by the FAO Pilot Project "Support to the preparation of a national land consolidation strategy and a land consolidation pilot project in Serbia" (TCP/YUG/3001) and this project proposal is a result of a fruitful cooperation of

University of Belgrade with Royal Institute of Technology (KTH). During preparation of the Strategy for Land Consolidation it was concluded that there is no possibilities for education of the specialists for land consolidation on the academic level. Development of this Master course represents implementation of the conclusions and recommendations from the Strategy for Land Consolidation. This study programme will end up with thesis work and obtaining Master's degree by students. During the two-year period (September 2007 – September 2009) of project implementation the specific objectives of the project are as follows:

- To develop new curriculum of Master programme in Land Law and Economy, new courses with teaching materials at the University of Belgrade (UB) by September 2009;
- To establish Centre for Land Management at the Faculty by March 2009;
- To introduce new IT teaching methodologies by September 2009;
- To retrain teachers and students;
- To disseminate the results.

Courses

- Real Property Law (10 credits)
- Environmental and Planning Law (10 credits)
- Property market (6 credits)
- Real Property Investment Analysis (7 credits)
- Natural Resources (6 credits)
- Infrastructure (7 credits)
- Geographic Information Systems (10 credits)
- Land development and consolidation, basic course (10 credits)
- Land development and consolidation, continuation course (12 credits)
- Urban Land Management (10 credits)
- Negotiation and communication (6 credits)

The thesis work will consist of in-depth studies in a subject area within the scope of the program and has 30 credits. The thesis may be carried out at any institution/authority acting in the field of land law and economy.

4. CONCLUSION

Land consolidation is important instrument for agriculture and rural development of every country. For Serbia, and other transition countries, it has even bigger importance, because it represents part of the political, economic and social reconstruction. Pilot Project (Support to the preparation of a national land consolidation strategy and a land consolidation pilot project in Serbia, TCP/YUG/3001, FAO), helped Serbia in developing new institutional and legal framework and starting a new phase of land consolidation. This was the first step and now recently established institution Agricultural Land Administration will overtake a leading role in this reform process. The new initiative of Belgrade University to develop the Master Course in Land Law and Economy will also have an impact on the process of land consolidation.

References

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