

28th Session of the Committee on Agriculture

Item 3.3: Governance of tenure of water resources for food and agriculture

With more than 733 million people currently living in areas of high or critical water stress, and a projected 30 percent increase in global water demand by 2050, the question of water resources allocation has never been more important. Agriculture is by far the largest user, accounting for 72 percent of global fresh water withdrawals. At the same time, agriculture faces increasing competition from industry, cities, and the environment. To address these competing challenges, water governance and its key aspect of water tenure play a critical role in ensuring sustainable livelihoods, environmental and resource protection, and sustainable economic development.

Some water tenure arrangements derive from formal law, while others are customary arrangements, which may or may not be recognized by formal law. Customary tenure arrangements relating to natural resources can assist in securing the tenure of a wide range of individuals and groups, including vulnerable populations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Different types of water tenure arrangements confer varying degrees of participation and inclusiveness, security, equity, sustainability, transparency, accountability and efficiency in allocation.

Water was not included in the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)*, officially endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 11 May 2012. Since then, FAO and its partners have spearheaded initiatives which show that a water tenure approach offers a unique perspective to understand the complexity of water rights and allocation systems and identify actionable and context-specific avenues to improve the governance of water tenure, as well as increase equity and security for water users.

Increasing water demand, coupled with the predicted impacts of climate change, poses a significant challenge for all countries in the context of food security. It will be necessary to strike a balance between the security necessary for investment and a sufficient flexibility, so that water is managed in a transparent and equitable manner to address the impacts of climate change and evolving needs. The responsible governance of water tenure can be an important vehicle for achieving this balance.

A Global Dialogue on Water Tenure, sponsored by FAO, can lead to an agreement on principles for responsible governance of water tenure through an inclusive and consultative process including governments, civil society and other multistakeholder platforms. The dialogue could be complemented by technical guidelines which could assist Members on development and implementation of policies for a responsible governance of water tenure in the context of achieving food security.

The Committee is invited to:

- *recognize* the importance of water tenure for the responsible governance of natural resources;
- *appreciate* FAO's support to countries through a "Global Dialogue on Water Tenure" and *look forward* to receiving regular updates on progress; and
- *encourage* Members to actively engage in the "Global Dialogue on Water Tenure".

Mr Lifeng Li, Director, Land and Water Division (NSL)