

Summary of Outcomes

The “Water Tenure Approaches for Securing Rights, Climate Resilience and Food Security” side event of the 49th Committee on World Food Security was held on 13th October. Organized by FAO Land and Water Division, in collaboration with the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the governments of Rwanda, Senegal and Sri Lanka, as well as the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), it attracted over 75 persons.

Presentations showed strong evidence of the significant role of water tenure from three perspectives in terms of: i) food security, water scarcity and climate resilience; ii) livelihoods of vulnerable people in particular rural communities, women, and indigenous people; iii) rural development to ensure water availability for farmer-led irrigation. In addition, the preliminary findings of the FAO project ‘Knowing water better: Towards fairer and more sustainable access to natural resources for greater food security – KnoWat’ initiated the panel discussion and showcased the application of the water tenure concept at country level. In Rwanda, the assessment of water users and uses updated in 2020 confirmed only 14% of the users have a water permit; many other water tenure arrangements co-exist. In Senegal, the analysis of local practices showed that the river watchman provides a bridge between customary water tenure and modern water rights, including on collective Kallongal flood plains.

The discussion linked the water tenure approaches to the 2015 Committee on Food Security recommendation to work towards equal access to water for all, prioritize the most vulnerable and marginalized, and foster inclusive and effective collaboration and national and local governance on water for food security and nutrition. Indeed, a water tenure approach can help protect the use rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups and their households, including women, small farmers and their family, fisher folk, indigenous people and those who depend on wetland products, to ensure that no one is left behind, in line with the Agenda 2030.

The event concluded that irrigated agriculture would be crucial in helping to feed 10 billion people in 2050 and that better water tenure arrangements have a vital role to play in improving efficiency and promoting the necessary investments. Dr Eva Müller from the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Germany (BMEL) proposed to broaden the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) to include water more explicitly. Lifeng Li, Director of the FAO Land and Water Division, stands ready to back this proposal and support countries through a ‘Global Dialogue on Water Tenure’ through an inclusive and consultative process to engage with Member States, as well as partners from civil society, academia and the private sector to develop Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Water Tenure.

Sasha Koo-Oshima, Deputy Director of the FAO Land and Water Division, highlighted that a first step in this process will be the release of the Summary Report of FAO flagship publication "The State of Land and Water Resources" (SOLAW) 2021 during the FAO Land and Water Days on 9 December 2021. SOLAW 21 highlights the major risks and trends related to land and water and presents integrated approaches to land and water management, as a means of resolving competition among land and water users and generating multiple benefits for people and the environment, with a special focus on governance of land and water resources.