

More on Tenure Governance

Eradicating hunger and poverty, and ensuring the sustainable use of the environment, depend in large measure on how people, communities and others gain and control access to land and other natural resources. The livelihoods of many, particularly the rural poor, depend on secure and equitable access to and control over these resources. They are the source of food and shelter; the basis for social, cultural and religious practices; and a central factor in economic growth.

- **Food security and poverty eradication:** Improved access and tenure security may allow a family to produce food for household food consumption, thus helping to ensure food security, and to increase household income by producing a surplus for sale in the market. Secure access to land often provides a valuable safety net as a source of shelter, food and income in times of hardship.
- **Responsible investment and environmental sustainability:** Good tenure arrangements promote practices that enhance the environment. Farmers are more likely to invest in improving their land through soil protection measures, planting trees and improving pastures if they have secure tenure and can benefit from their investments.
- **Gender equality:** Tenure initiatives that promote gender equity may also indirectly serve to further empower women. Improved tenure rights can increase women's power in social and political relationships. Providing secure tenure rights for women can increase their social and political status, and improve their sense of self-esteem, confidence, security and dignity.

Tenure and its Governance

How people, communities and others gain access to land, fisheries and forests is defined and regulated by societies through systems of tenure. The rules of tenure determine who can use which resources, for how long, and under what conditions. They may be based on written policies and laws, as well as on unwritten customs and practices.

Tenure systems increasingly face stress as the world's growing population requires food security, and as environmental degradation and climate change reduce the availability of land, fisheries and forests. Inadequate and insecure tenure rights increase vulnerability, hunger and poverty, and can lead to conflict and environmental degradation when competing users fight for control of these resources.

The governance of tenure is a crucial element in determining if and how people, communities and others are able to acquire rights, and associated duties, to use and control land, fisheries and forests. Many tenure problems arise because of weak governance, and attempts to address tenure problems are affected by the quality of governance. Weak governance adversely affects social stability, sustainable use of the environment, investment and economic growth. People can be condemned to a life of hunger and poverty if they lose their tenure rights to their homes, land, fisheries and forests and their livelihoods because of corrupt tenure practices or if implementing agencies fail to protect their tenure rights. People may even lose their lives when weak tenure governance leads to violent conflict. Responsible governance of tenure conversely promotes sustainable social and economic development that can help eradicate poverty and food insecurity, and encourages responsible investment.

Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure

Voluntary Guidelines set out principles and internationally accepted standards for responsible practices. They provide a framework that States can use when developing their own strategies, policies, legislation and programmes. They allow government authorities, the private sector, civil society and citizens to judge whether their proposed actions and the actions of others constitute acceptable practices. The Voluntary Guidelines on the governance of tenure were finalized through intergovernmental negotiations, led by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). They were officially endorsed by CFS on 11 May 2012.