

## **Recent activities on land consolidation in Serbia**

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“**THINK BIG** do little. Start an avalanche”

### **1. Introduction**

The small size of agricultural parcels, great dispersion and uneconomically shaped parcels are some of the main structural problems of Serbian agriculture. Bearing the fact that Serbia is one of the most rural jurisdictions in Europe, that is a big problem. In Serbia, about 50 percent of the population lives in rural areas, and about 20 percent of the labor force work in the agricultural sector. About 97 percent of the 6,152 settlements in Serbia are rural, and the rural territory covers over 95 percent of the surface area.

The situation in rural areas is getting worse as the time goes by. The differences in the quality of life in urban and rural areas is becoming greater. In rural areas the opportunities for employment outside of agriculture are becoming limited. Migration from rural areas threatens to result in communities having large elderly populations and others who cannot farm actively. Over 70 percent of farms are smaller than five hectares and the fragmentation process continues. Farms are not market-oriented and most of the production is for subsistence. Information about the ownership of land is often not updated. Land registers were neglected after the Second World War due to political reasons, and ceased to be maintained. Few cadastre plans exist in digital form. All in all, the quality of living in rural areas is much worse than in urban areas.

Unlike most transition countries Serbia has a long tradition of land consolidation and there is an existing legal framework. The first land consolidation took place in the territory of modern-day Vojvodina in 1848 and under the Austro-Hungarian Laws. Work on land consolidation in central Serbia started only after the Second World War. Land consolidation was used to increase the size of social-owned areas. The latest law regulating land consolidation was enacted in 1992 (Law on agricultural land). There are difficulties with the current processes for land consolidation, and in practice, land consolidation exercises virtually ceased in the early 1990s. The situation is severe because:

- There was no connection whatsoever between land consolidation and terrain plans and plans of village arrangements.
- Economic and market principles were not taken care of.
- There was a limit of ten ha for each and every private property.
- There was no democratic participation of all actors in this process and usually that discredited the entire process.

### **2. Current activities**

Modern times require more effective approaches to land consolidation in order to increase productivity and efficiency in the agricultural sector, and to bring the quality of living to higher level. Today, in Serbia, the need for land consolidation is recognized by all relevant

institutions as well as the farmers. Everyone understands the necessity for land consolidation as the only mean for revitalizing the agricultural production and rural areas in general.

The significance of land consolidation was acknowledged by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. That is very important because without their support and initiative the work on the land consolidation would not be possible. The Government, represented by the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management initiated two big steps towards implementation of land consolidation in Serbia.

The first step is introducing the new Law on agricultural land. The draft of the new law enables a “simple form” of land consolidation, besides the old “complex form”. The concept of a “simple form” of land consolidation consists in the amalgamation and re-allotment of plots and parcels using voluntary land exchange to merge scattered and/or uneconomically shaped parcels of two or more owners. If there is a need to consolidate many scattered and/or uneconomically shaped parcels in a community, the land consolidation procedure concentrates on the merging and reshaping of adjoining parcels. Through this “accelerated land consolidation” land is regrouped or rearranged in units of economic size and rational shape. Since this type represents a profound intervention in the territorial organization of an entire community, the land consolidation procedure is to be initiated by a local authority and closely monitored, supervised and approved by a normative authority or agency.

As second step the Government requested technical assistance from FAO considering the Organization’s expertise and experience with land consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe. As the result we have now the TCP project which started in April this year. The project ranks among the highest priorities of the Republic of Serbia. The TCP project proposal is in line with the Policy Framework for Serbian Agriculture and the national strategies for sustainable rural development. The Framework emphasizes the immediate need for addressing land issues, in particular consolidation and management. Furthermore, various international stakeholders are assisting the Serbian government in addressing important problems related to landownership and holding. For example, the World Bank is tackling the problems related to unclear property rights (land registration and real estate cadastre); GTZ focuses on real property registration and land management at the municipal level and SIDA supports the government in land management issues with capacity building (e.g. land surveying). However, a particular issue still to be addressed concerns land consolidation in rural areas. In this context, the Serbian Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, requested FAO technical assistance related to agriculture and rural development, and identified a TCP project on land consolidation as a priority.

This TCP project prepares the way for a national programme on land consolidation. The main outputs are:

- Preparation of a proposal for a national strategy for land consolidation.
- Design and implementation of a small land consolidation pilot component.
- Capacity building in land consolidation.

**a) *Preparation of a proposal for a national strategy for land consolidation***

In this output several issues will be considered. According to that four outputs will be provided.

First among them is analysis of the policy and legal framework as it relates to land consolidation. This includes identification of current policies and legislation related to land

consolidation, including agriculture and rural development policies, and analysis of their constraints and opportunities relevant to land consolidation. It will, also, provide recommendations for improving the legal framework.

The second output is the analysis of organizational arrangements as they relate to land consolidation. This includes identification of existing organizational structures, identification of measures that could be introduced in the short-term, development of longer-term proposals for organizational arrangements. It also ensures that the proposed institutional setup is EU-compatible.

The third output is analysis of key issues related to land consolidation.

The fourth and most important output is proposals for a national land consolidation strategy. The strategy will be proposed, then reviewed before its finalization.

***b) Design and implementation of a small land consolidation pilot component***

For the purposes of implementing the land consolidation, the cadastral community of Velika Mostanica has been selected as a pilot area. It is a rural area with 3210 inhabitants and 62 farming households. This community has been selected because it fulfils selection criteria and furthermore because of awareness of the farmers in that community. There is, also, a great support from local authorities which is vital in the projects of this kind. There are, already, being conducted activities which include the design and implementation of a public awareness campaign (including the use of appropriate information materials and workshops) to inform beneficiaries about land consolidation, including the procedures, implications, potentials and constraints (Fig.1)



*Fig. 1. Meeting of FAO experts and local consultants with farmers in village Velika Mostanica*

The next step is assessment of the situation in the community. It includes an assessment of the needs and perspectives of beneficiaries and other stakeholders for a land consolidation project and assessment of social, economic and ecological potentials and constraints for land consolidation in the pilot area, and identification of related requirements. In this step it is

important to identify the state of existing cadastral plans and data in this area. They are not up to date and they are very inaccurate, mostly in residential part of the community. The situation in the area of agricultural land is not so bad, but still not good enough (Fig. 2.).



*Fig. 2. – Village Velika Mostanica - orthophoto and cadastral plan*

After that, preparation of an area development plan for the community needs to be done. Activities will include preparation of alternative scenarios of the community area development plan and selection of preferred alternative and finalization of community area development plan.

When all that is done, the main step is re-allotment of parcels. This includes: public meetings, preparation of map showing ownership and use rights of the community, discussions with individual stakeholders regarding their interests and wishes, assessment of possibilities for re-allotment of parcels, negotiation between stakeholders for the re-allotment of parcels, valuation of parcels to be included in the re-allotment, preparation of draft map showing the re-allotment of parcels, approval and agreement to the proposed re-allotment, finalization of the re-allotment plan and finally, registration and finalization of transfer agreements.

At the end the manual for the design and implementation of land consolidation pilot projects based on the practical experience will be done.

### *c) Capacity building in land consolidation*

The objective of this output is training of national consultants by an international consultant and FAO on elements of the design and implementation of a pilot project and also, training and awareness raising of relevant Government personnel by national consultants, including capacity building in agriculture and rural development policy issues.

## **3. Conclusion**

Now, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management has a definite plan of development in agriculture. Unlike other transition countries Serbia has previous experience in land consolidation. But, it has the kind of experience that is now disadvantage – experience in land consolidation that is suitable for a socialist but not modern, European economy. Due to FAO, Serbia is now, regarding the land consolidation, at a new beginning. The TCP project will provide modern approaches to land consolidation and it will assist Government to develop a national land consolidation strategy. That will ensure that future work in land consolidation supports rural development.

**References**

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2. Draft Law on Agricultural Land, Republic of Serbia, 2007.