

A Reality Check on the Quest for Tenure Security and Land Administration in Ethiopia

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Summary

Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) is the new policy and program context in the developing world within which land administration (LA) is now being discussed. There seem to be good reasons for doing so. Most people who are designated as poor in these countries live off the land. However, the land from which they earn their livelihood is beset by a variety of problems (degradation, fragmentation, etc). Also, the poor land owners/users are helplessly witnessing the deterioration of the cherished asset reportedly because of tenure insecurity, poverty, and other reasons. The net impact is more destitution and perhaps starvation. Therefore, for LA to be relevant, it has to tally with poverty reduction, help reverse this trend and thereby assist the poor improve their lot. Like most countries in the developing world, this characterization of LA and poverty somehow explains the situation in Ethiopia. Analysing policy statements set out in the country's Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) and other documents, this paper attempts to make a short to mid term prognosis of tenure insecurity and LA. To complement this, the situation of land users and their land is briefly analysed based on primary data obtained from a field survey. An aspect of this survey that looked into willingness to pay (WTP) for titling found out that farmers are committed to earn their tenure security. In relation to government activity, the emerging 'nation-wide' land certification is considered which some regard as a welcome development due to the promise it holds in reducing tenure insecurity. On the other hand, there are also legitimate concerns that admonish that this endeavour could be severely handicapped in availing the benefits of conventional LA because it lacks spatial framework (geometric information) and also the commensurate legislative reform.

1. Background

Ethiopia is a federation of ethnic States/Regions. In relation to land, the Federal Government and the States have different responsibilities. While the task of the Federal Government is to 'enact laws for the utilization and conservation of land and other natural resources,' the States are entrusted with the administration of land (which is understood to mean 'free assignment of holding rights both to peasants and nomads') and other natural resources in accordance with Federal laws. Therefore, Regional States have established LA agencies in the last five years to see to it that this mandate is well taken care of.

Land is under state ownership in Ethiopia. This policy has its origins in the Marxist Leninist persuasion that was very much in vogue among the country's elite in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, the Ethiopian student movement embraced and championed the cause of public ownership of land also with considerable public support including the military. When the latter assumed political power in mid 1970's, the leftist persuasion became state doctrine along with the immediate institution of state ownership of land. Though this was a move towards state ownership of private property, most welcomed it because of the hitherto cruel land tenure regime that particularly subjugated indigenous people in parts of the country. The

policy didn't change when the students replaced the military in 1991 after a protracted armed struggle. Presently, for some, who still cling to the now outdated ideology, this is a measure taken once and for all-never to be challenged and never to be changed. Others who have been upholding this tenure regime advance a variety of socioeconomic hypotheses (largely centered on equity) not only to justify their position but also to maintain the status quo. In general, the familiar dictum that proponents of state ownership share sounds like "tenure security can often be enhanced quite independently from rights to transfer land" (Deininger, 2003) though how this can be realized is still an issue of policy debate and public policy action.

On the other hand, there are those, owing to the collapse of communism and the 'utter victory' of Capitalism, who can be labeled as old adherents of the freehold persuasion with renewed vigor and also the 'new converts' who chose to reconsider their ideological stance and thus favor private property. These consider the current policy just as an aspect of 'the political patronage system'. Thus, due to this but more importantly because of the alarming situation in the rural areas including 30 years of lackluster performance in agriculture, a number of them seriously challenge the wisdom of the existing land policy regime and demand for a policy swing towards private property.

Therefore, if one ignores ideology and the empty either or construct, one can see that equity and perhaps more importantly tenure security, whose dearth is regarded as the source of most land related problems in the country is at the heart of it all. In other words, tenure security is the bottom line of the land debate in Ethiopia and the quest for it has led to different propositions and measures. This paper looks at policy statements, current government activities, and land users opinions with a view to ascertaining if the quest for tenure security is on the way to be met or not.

2. Macro-Level Ambivalence: undecided SDPRP

The PRS of Ethiopia, which is officially called Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), came into being in July 2002 after an interim program of the same type had run for some time. Like some other PRSs, the thinking behind Ethiopia's SDPRP is the dismal performance of the economy and the deepening of poverty.

Lack of or limited development particularly in the rural areas and increasing marginalization of the poor have obliged major international actors to make a u-turn in development policy thinking and to coin the PRS model. This has basically meant a major overhaul in terms of focus and in the way development policies are formulated and implemented. Likewise, this has also meant changes in the context as well as the manner land issues are addressed.

Apparently, apart from own labor, rural land has, being the only asset at the disposal of the poor, become a focus of intervention within the PRS framework and many believe that it is one of the means through which the poverty of the poor could be dealt with. This has in turn put LA at the heart of a new policy deliberation under the poverty reduction framework. In fact, the most recent land policy document formulated by the World Bank has the term poverty reduction in the title, not least because of the need to emphasize this linkage and address the new agenda.

Now, in places like Ethiopia, PRS is a kind of paradigm that sets out a new macro policy and program framework wherein one would see the big picture and also glean facts as to the direction of specific issues like the land issue. Thus, based on the SDPRP (2002) and other documents, the following can be construed as regards the future (short to mid term) of LA and tenure security in Ethiopia.

The SDPRP has four major thrusts: Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI¹), Civil Service and Judiciary Reform, Capacity Building, and Decentralization and Empowerment. Of these, ADLI is the component in which the value added that may accrue from LA will mainly be realized. Potential benefits of LA like improved tenure security, improved investment on land, better taxation, secure and simple procedures for land transaction, etc are likely to pay major dividends in agricultural and industrial development. In terms of securing performance boost, strengthening LA would tally with the capacity building realm. The civil service reform and decentralization components are linked to LA in the sense that its operation will, of necessity, be guided by the arrangements that these two would entail. That would generally mean fair and doable procedures, transparent and customer-oriented public service which is, at the same time, accessible by and closer to the people. In practice, the latter would mean many things and comprehensive analyses of these would be beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, the attempt here will be limited to analysing the nature of LA that the SDPRP is birthing and what it can achieve in terms of tenure security.

2.1 Property rights enforcement

Under SDPRP, protection of property rights is one area of reform. Therefore, the government is convinced that “making the judiciary transparent and accountable will greatly improve the enforcement of contracts and property rights, and thereby reduce non-commercial risks (SDPRP, p.41, 2002)”. Clearly, this is about reforming the way the judiciary does business and is not necessarily a reference to a kind of property right registration through the justice system as is the case for example in Austria, Sweden, etc. Therefore, as far as the land sector goes, the envisaged improvement could only assist leasehold rights both in urban and probably in commercial agriculture areas by refining and expediting the way property rights are enforced and disputes are resolved.

Otherwise, LA activities in urban areas including the way rights are managed would remain the same (municipal task, limited deeds registry, sketches/maps showing the extent of rights, etc) even though additional administrative measures that would solve some of LA problems (prohibitive lease prices, slow delivery of land, the supply of unserviced land, illegal occupation of land, etc) associated with leasehold would be introduced. “Since land is a crucial element for all development engagements; appropriate land provision mechanism and overall management system is expected to enhance poverty alleviation programs by facilitating land lease management. Strategies to be pursued include the following: land acquisition criteria will be revised to improve access and affordability; prepare and enforce guidelines to resolve the problems of illegal occupation of urban land; conduct land supply improvement study; conduct land valuation study (SDPRP,p.127, 2002).”

The introduction of targeted land based collateral in agriculture is a departure that has materialized with the publication of the SDPRP. “Leasing of land by the government will be encouraged by specifying the conditions of lease to facilitate the collateralisation of land, and foster land use based on environmental protection (SDPRP, p.39, 2002).” Land rights and resources management of this type would surely entail proper ‘documentation and representation of assets.’ In this context, this would be a new assignment for rural land administrators. However, as the number and nature of expected transactions of these type will

¹ ADLI is about commercialization of the current subsistence agriculture with a view to availing a viable domestic market, raw materials and generating surplus capital that could later be used to initiate and foster industrial development.

not be that involving, it should be possible for the existing LA system, with some capacity related boost, to generate the required land info on case-by-case basis and support the need for rights documentation.

As far as the land operated by small holders is concerned, though supporting land rental market in a similar manner might be necessary, the possible numerousness and minuscule nature of most transfers (entailing high transaction costs) vis-à-vis limited capacity of government authorities particularly at district level would be a source of concern. As well as inadequacy of support and many minute transactions, lack of trust may render the existing informal land rental practices to linger on and defeat the purpose of organized support. Of course, it should be noted here that these and other reflections related to land rental are premised on the assumption that the prevailing sense of insecurity doesn't persist and stand in the way of increased rural land transactions.

2.2 Security of tenure

The SDPRP must be the first government document to duly recognize tenure insecurity as a problem that is worth solving. However, the recognition is far from being coherent. Because, up until recently, giving access in perpetuity while, at the same time, reserving the right to redistribute land was considered as a secure enough arrangement by the Ethiopian government. And this may not have changed. For instance, as recently as September 2004, the famous Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz said “the overwhelming evidence is that security of use goes 90% of the way to providing what is needed for land security, and that the extra benefits of privatisation are accompanied by enormous risks and costs,” (Reporter, 2004) and thereby reiterated the well known government position. However, there is some evidence that show this thinking is not tenable. First of all, the policy is not just use right but use right cum redistribution. On top of that, the rationale behind the new government owned land certification program is nothing but the need to address the pervasive sense of insecurity whose magnitude is certainly far larger than the 10% level Stiglitz came up with. Be that as it may, the land certification is one of the attempts that the SDPRP is introducing to ‘protect’ the use rights of land users by registering their holding and issuing certificates that are supposed to further guarantee holders from facing another loss through land redistribution at least for a period of 20-30 years. Essentially this would mean expanding the reach of the use right certificates that Tigray Region had experimented with (with perhaps some modifications and improvements). What is different this time is the scope of the upcoming work, which is a kind of mass (systematic??) certification². For this, region-specific registration arrangements and certificates are developed (see annexes). The newly instituted district level LA offices are also expected to get their first hands-on experience on LA practice, too. More information on this development is provided in section 3 as part of the case review.

2.3 Land transactions

At the level individual farmer, a situation whereby the possibility of widespread land related transaction or a condition where land will be used as a collateral to access institutional finance is unlikely to occur any time soon. What the government is planning to implement, in addition to financial intermediation based on group collateral and regional government guarantee of input loans (through their budgets), is the provision of credit that would make farmers' produce to be held as a collateral. This is to be supplemented by crop insurance in the event the collateral is unavailable because of natural and other disasters. The rationale behind this policy seems to be the need to stave off the condition whereby land may become a collateral

² In Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) alone this may involve as many as 3.5 million farmers and 16.5 million parcels.

and taken away from farmers. This would restrict, if not totally eliminate, land transfer related functions of LA.

Transactions cannot be totally ruled out, because of informal transfers and also the intention of the government³ to strengthen land rental and to support it with appropriate legal and procedural arrangements. In essence, this would partly be recognition and mainstreaming of existing land rental markets and may thus call for limited land market related support for example around major urban centres where export products like flower are grown on leased plots. As noted above, apart from this, rural land administrators in the country will not be required to carry out land market related functions.

2.4 Land management and land use planning

Other major activity where the support of LA might be required is land use planning and management. In this connection, the needs to be served are unveiled in the following manner: “Land, whether private or government owned should be utilized in such a way that its opportunity cost does not nullify its contribution to overall socio-economic development. The need for developing the profile of land resources and harmonization of existing land use policies of regional states is high on the agenda. Land resources earmarked for pasture, cultivation, urban development, and commercial farm need to be worked out and articulated by each regional state/city administration (SDPRP, p. 54, 2004).” This activity falls within the jurisdiction of the newly established LA agencies and obviously requires spatial dataset.

The scale at which LU plans are going to be formulated is not specified and that makes it difficult to critique the plan. One thing is clear though. The proposed exercise cannot be a reference to some small-scale endeavour as this has been tried in the country and proved ineffective. Thus, what is in the pipeline could be detailed land use planning, a task which will then be quite big and beyond the capacity of the prevailing LA in the country in terms of existing capacity. In addition to the usual resources related constraints (finance, manpower), lack of spatial data would be a major impediment unless detailed land resources data, perhaps in the context of multipurpose cadastre, is in place.

3. Mesolevel avant-garde: land Administration piloting

Though political and socio-economic discourse in Ethiopia has land as one the most highly flagged issues, it has failed far short in doing justice to the different dimensions of the subject. LA has therefore been neglected until the beginning of this century and the return of formal LA institutions, albeit at Regional level. The formulation of rules and regulations, the establishment of institutions, etc have taken place in the last five years. More recently, further steps that aim at registering holding rights are being undertaken.

In Amhara National Regional State (ANRS), an innovative LA project whose objective was developing ‘a way of working’ has been piloted. The pilot covered two kebeles⁴ that occupy a combined area of about 3500 ha. The project experimented with a number of LA activities that led to developing a doable methodology save the part that dealt with getting a spatial framework (boundary demarcation). In the context of the pilot project, the boundary demarcation exercise involved in the use of total stations along with GPS and this has naturally turned out to be time consuming and costly. Except for this aspect of the exercise, scaling-up and implementing most activities tested during the piloting through out the region is now envisaged. Thus, the final region-wide registration and certification would involve activities in two phases leading to two types of certifications:

³ In ANRS a directive that aims to extend the lease period up to 25 years formulated.

⁴ the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia coming just below a district (woreda)

1. Primary Book of Holding-PBH (annex 3) will be issued during the first phase of the land certification process and the time frame of this would be the coming few years. This will have no conventionally surveyed spatial framework (boundaries). In this context, parcel boundary demarcation will rely on the use of unconventional (non-geometric) methods like the use of relative location which is a way of referencing some body's plot in relation to the holders of neighboring plots. With this approach, determining the extent of rights would just be a task left for right holders and LA will have no means to record, reestablish, etc boundaries. Hence, its usefulness for boundary dispute resolution, land transfer, etc would be limited. In comparison with conventional methods, this is a low cost and quick approach that would entail considerable savings in money and time. It is thus no wonder that the simple method is attractive to the authorities who had to do something about the land rights stalemate. Nonetheless, the work, even with this approach, would be quite involving and the amount of information to be generated is quite enormous (see annexes). That is why a census type campaign is to be instituted to accomplish the task.
2. Secondary Book of Holding-SBH (annex 3) will be issued during the second phase. The time frame here would be a little longer as, if nothing else, the project managers would need time to take stock of first phase activities and also to raise funds needed to finance the most costly surveying and mapping task which, inter alia, is expected to be undertaken at this stage. The SBH is expected to incorporate cadastral maps. Within this framework, the envisaged land information tasks would be carried out at two levels. Thus, the first level will embrace demarcation and measurements of district (woreda), kebele, sub-kebele, communal, and service area boundaries. The second level will involve demarcation of individual parcel boundaries through out the region and as it stands, the plan (at least in ANRS) is to use orthophotos and secure appropriate spatial framework. Looking at the magnitude of the task one would wonder if this could be tantamount to mapping of the inhabited part of Amhara.

As ANRS is a pioneer that has been trying to find out what it takes to establish LA and institutional learning being what it is in the country, one could fairly conclude that the certification process in all non-pastoral regions will more or less follow this model. Generally, the land certification is said to be a welcome development. Having targeted a long-standing problem, it has received a measure of acclaim both by civil society and donors. Now, the question is whether this is a worthwhile exercise that will deliver the much sought after good, namely, tenure insecurity. The answer here is both yes and no. Yes, if the required legislative backing is in place and land administration is disentangled from political manipulation. No, if these prerequisites continue to be unavailable.

To elaborate, the certificates are less likely to have much impact in view of confusing policy signals and erratic government behaviour. In connection with policy ambivalence, for instance, the SDPRP contains measures that are meant to ensure tenure security and in the same breath it says, "It is impossible to ensure agricultural development at the desired rate and on a sustainable basis, unless we are able to use our land efficiently. In this respect, guaranteeing the availability of land for people who are able and willing to make a living out of farming is fundamental and is a step in the right direction for proper use of land resources (SDPRP, p.54, 2002)." This mirrors the constitutional provision that entitles every Ethiopian who wishes to engage in farming a piece of land. Also, it points to 'the continued mandate' of the government that is retained to enforce the exercise of this right which simply means redistribution. This is the policy direction that has made the government's approach to tenure security untenable and also what has thus far been frustrating the quest for tenure security.

This needs to change. However, if such far-off pledges could not be completely revoked or redistribution couldn't be totally banned, the second best thing to do would perhaps be going for a legislation that would institute the promised 20-30 redistribution free years as these might go some way in unseating the apprehension and restoring confidence.

Another important observation on a related matter concerns the inadequate and inconsistent legal environment wherein the certification in particular and LA in general is being practiced. It is said that there are contradictions between provisions in the constitution and the LA proclamation. There are inconsistencies between federal and regional legal provisions. Also, conflicts are reported to prevail between the legal framework for land and other laws of the country like the family law. "The identified gaps in the existing legal framework for LA in the country and, in particular (in ANRS) have an impact on tenure security...filling such gaps will contribute to the improvement of people's livelihood" (Evaluation Report, 2003). Though there is no doubt that "legal concepts need to be translated into something that can be physically identified on the ground" (Deininger, p.69, 2003) through land registration and certification, "tenure security is often a question of perception and interpretation of the socio-political climate in relation to land rights, and in this context the law is critical" (DFID, p.12, 2002).

The infeasibility of the orthophoto option could also be pointed out here not least because of cost and technical impediments. For a very large place like Amhara, not only would the cost be prohibitive and overwhelming, but the infrastructure and the technical requirements would also be immense. These also hold even if outsourcing the services is considered. Therefore, the search for a more cheap and faster data collection methodology has to resume.

4. Microlevel inadequacy and unmet needs

The discussion here is based on a field survey, which was conducted between March and May 2004. It was undertaken in 3 woredas (districts) which are located in three different zones of the Amhara Region. Two of the districts are classified as food insecure while the third is regarded as food secure. The survey locations are spread and made to represent different agro-ecologies and communities in a bid to obtain a representative sample. The survey covered randomly selected 239 households (HHs) which are interviewed using a structured questionnaire that sought information on 25 variables. The objectives of the survey include the following: i) to assess the need for LA and see how strong this need is and why; ii) to get insight as to the situation of land use and the views of land users on a number of LA issues.

The data collected in this manner has been analysed using SPSS (statistical software). Among other things, some outputs that came out of the analyses are given below in order to demonstrate the prevalence of problems that could benefit from a functioning LA. A functioning LA, in the case of Ethiopia, would, among other things, presuppose a meaningful presence (adequate personnel, competence, realistic systems, infrastructure, etc) at district level. The district LA, having just come out of the formative phase, doesn't have this now. And it would also need quite some time before it could acquire these capacities and become a force to reckon with.

4.1 Demographic and land holding characteristics

Farm households are still large in Ethiopia. About 90% of the households (HHs) contain big families having 5 or larger number of individuals. The trend in holding size in the study areas shows diminutions of larger holdings as well as enlargements of smaller ones. The holdings of 40 % of the HHs used to be between 1 and 2 ha and the number of HHs has increased now to 60% indicating a consolidation trend. On the other hand, the number of households having 2 ha and larger holdings has declined from 16.3% to 9.6 % over the same period. Respondents

who seem to have obtained plots in the last 20 years are about 14.6%. In general, the data show that land is changing hands. And this cannot be attributed to land redistribution alone as discussions with farmers have revealed inheritance and informal transfers (even acquisitions through illicit sales)⁵ have been playing a role in moving land from one holder to another. One has to know the number and the nature of transfers, data which is currently hard to come by, in order to figure out the kind of LA support that might be needed here. For now suffice is to recognize that considerable land transfers are taking place.

4.2 Multiplicity of parcels and exchange

An interesting dimension of the land use profile is the multiplicity of parcels. The survey revealed that 93% of the households have 3 or more than 3 parcels. The need to give access to plots of different fertility levels is the main reason for the fragmentation of parcels. In a way, this is in the interest of the land users. However, the need to exchange parcels to make one's holding contiguous, less distant, etc has been quite significant that about 103 HHs have done it on their own. Of the 136 respondents, who said they have never done any parcel exchange, 27% claimed having plots in different locations is a security against calamities. Another 18% thought the law doesn't permit to exchange parcels and 16% couldn't find willing party. The latter group plus the 103 HHs who did parcel exchange on their own represent unserved customers in relation to LA/land consolidation. In fact, some regions, having recognized the problem of fragmentation, have already begun introducing laws that set minimum parcel size (0.25 ha in Tigray and Oromia Regions) beyond which parcels may not be subdivided. Therefore, both the land consolidation demand as well as the need to implement the minimum parcel size law would entail land information that could be extracted from a reasonably instituted LA system. This can happen in an environment where registration is mandatory and land users/owners are required to get authorization before subdivision (Larson, 1991).

4.3 Land related problems (LRP)

Land shortage/scarcity of land tops the list of land related problems with 36% of respondents ranking it as their first and foremost constraint. When the frequency of prior rankings is considered, the top ranking problems that come on the list in a descending order are declining fertility (29%), soil erosion (16%), fragmentation (10%), tenure insecurity (5%) and boundary disputes. Tenure insecurity hasn't figured out prominently in this ranking and the reason for this is discussed in section 4.5. Shortage of land among existing holders is a function of fragmentation and loss due to redistribution, inheritance and land degradation. LA could help deal with this problem by providing a mechanism whereby sub-divisions could be monitored and/or land management could be improved.

4.4 Boundary Disputes

Traditionally this is one of the areas where LA is known to have been adding value. The study areas seem to suggest this could also be the case in Ethiopia. Respondents in the survey were asked if they had ever experienced boundary disputes. Those who replied this in the affirmative were also requested to tell how often they had encountered conflicts and the size of land that led to the dispute or disputes. 35.1% of the respondents said they had experienced boundary disputes in the last 10 years. Of these, 45% had dispute only once, 38% between 2-5 times and 17% more than 5 times. The size of land that caused disputes was larger than 0.5 meter for 61% of them.

4.5 Certification of holding rights and willingness to pay

The one and only one question where all respondents unanimously converged is the desire to register their plots and obtain credentials that show they have a holding right to the land they

⁵ Some of the respondents privately intimated this info during the survey.

are using. Even the differences they have on the reasons why they require this land rights registration is minimal as 95 % of them said they need the documentation to ensure tenure security. Despite this, tenure insecurity didn't get top ranking as a land related problem (LRP). The explanation for this has to do with the way the questions were presented to the respondents. In the discussion with farmers they have made it clear that tenure insecurity, for most farmers, is a problem of a different order and is not just another LRP.

Looking at determinants of the need for land registration once again, one can see that the concern that came next to tenure security in the ranking is the need to prevent boundary disputes followed by the desire to obtain loans and then the need to be able to mortgage their land. Apparently, all of these can be taken care of through a functioning a LA system and in that sense the priorities of the respondents are compatible with conventional benefits of titling. The preferred type of certification for about half of the respondents is a certificate plus an image map, while 26% resorted to a certificate and a line map. Those who will be satisfied with the ongoing type of titling (only certificates, no graphic data) constitute about a quarter of the respondents. The response here could slightly be biased by the image demo that had been made during the interview.

Willingness to pay (WTP) is another variable on which respondents were asked to air their views. This is important because of the insight this could avail as to the feasibility of land registration in which cost benefit would be an important consideration. –

Therefore, farmers' willingness to pay for registration and certification is supposed to provide a clue as to the importance they attach to this undertaking and also a nod if cost sharing with landholders was a possibility. The latter is important not only in terms of easing financial burden but also of ensuring sustainability of a registration scheme. The conditions under which farmers were requested to express their WTP were the following: titling would stop land redistribution and ensure tenure security. This would mean that farmers would have exclusive holding rights over their holdings and that holdings would not be partially or fully taken away from current holders and their descendants unless the holders themselves relinquish the right, etc. In order not to create unrealistic scenario, the possibility to transfer land without restriction has not been brought up at all.

An interesting finding that has come out of the survey is that the overwhelming majority (84.1%) is willing to pay to get titles that would ensure tenure security. The amount of money that farmers pledged ranges between about USD 1.25 and USD 35⁶ over a 10 years payment vehicle for a hectare of land with average fertility. The gist of this finding is generally in line with what Tekie (2000) has found out. Of course, when the details of the two findings are compared, there are differences related to the proportion of people who are willing to pay and the strength of WTP as expressed in the maximum amount of money that farmers said they would commit if tenure security were to be guaranteed. In both cases, however, one could see farmers' resolve to ensure tenure security. At a time when the government is running an extensive land certification exercise for free (and farmers know about this), the fact that farmers are willing to pay for such an endeavour shows the utmost importance they attach to it. Further, their WTP shows the possibility for cost sharing and thereby the potential for enhanced ownership of land registration exercise which would in any case depend on their support, financial or otherwise, for its continued relevance and sustainability. Households who like to have their land rights documented but are not willing to pay for it are about 16%. In a bid to identify and characterize those farmers who showed maximum WTP, some correlation routines were run and these have resulted in lack of strong correlation between

⁶ The titling fee was \$3.6 per title during the second land titling program in Thailand.

WTP and land holding size/amount of money paid as tax (the latter considered as a proxy for income), etc. Therefore, one could fairly say that farmers who have been found to represent higher WTP are not necessarily those who hold big chunks of land. In fact, it is one of the food insecure districts that has emerged as having higher WTP.

As regards the preferred institution that may play a leading role in ensuring tenure security through titling, 66% chose the government to assume the responsibility while 29 % went for community based local institutions. Those who said both parties should work together are about 5%. Once again this in a way fits well with prior expectation in that farmers yearn for statutory legitimacy which has thus far been an instrument of dispossession.

Related to this, the survey has also found that most respondents (89%) to be willing to notify changes in their holding rights that may arise from transactions like long term land rental or due to inheritance. Interestingly, 11.3 % said they would not do so as this is a private matter that should not be disclosed to a third party. Nonetheless, if and when land registration is instituted, the willingness of the land users to be continually engaged in re-registration exercise is there. In fact, definitive conclusion cannot be made based on this information alone as this also depends on several other factors like the scope of land transactions, the proximity and relevance of the service, the size of service fees, etc.

5. Conclusion

The paper has thus far reviewed some developments and ongoing concerns including the land debate which unfortunately is far from being put to rest. The debate has recently become one-sided because the government had declared the policy component of it to be dead and thus seems to, within the prevailing policy framework, concentrate only on instituting mechanisms (e.g. land certification) that it believes would bring about tenure security. This disposition seems to have got additional impetus with the launch of the New Coalition for Food Security, i.e., a third generation food security program which has as one of its approaches the idea of 'saving livelihoods' which basically means 'protecting and building the assets of the poor'. Securing a national consensus on this issue is surely helpful.

The LA agencies are one of the good things that have happened recently to the land sector in the country and one could fairly be optimistic as to the promise they hold in ending the neglect of land resources. However, a strategic framework and coordination at the federal level that may bring coherence between urban and rural LA and also the various activities of the regional LA agencies is missing. A careful review of this gap is in the interest of all.

As has been shown, the land issue has not featured prominently in the SDPRP perhaps because of the afore-mentioned government policy posture. On the other hand, this inadvertence seems to be a characteristics feature of almost all PRSPs. "In Africa, a number of PRSPs and I-PRSPs do mention land, but generally fail to set it in strategic context for poverty reduction. The absence of access to land from Asian PRSPs and I-PRSPs is striking, given the importance of land access and governance issues for poverty reduction in the region (DFID, P. 24, 2004)." As has been shown, the SDPRP also sends, like other relevant government documents, conflicting signals concerning tenure security and has not therefore been reassuring.

The land use and land users situation is as reported by other researchers. Land is getting scarce by the day. Land users attach great importance to tenure security. If any thing, the WTP exercise demonstrates farmers' resolve to secure their rights. That should also be the reason why they are found to be enthusiastic about the new land registration and certification effort.

The piloting exercise in ANRS has been an eye opener in the sense that it has shown what it takes if and when conventional LA is to be instituted. It has confirmed the government's decision to go for an unconventional land titling, i.e., titling without spatial framework. The planned land certification is regarded as a welcome development. As it is under implementation, it may be too early to speak of the impact of this exercise now. However, if things go the way they are going it could be concluded that the exercise is taking place in policy and legal vacuum. This is, in other words, to say that it lacks the commensurate legal and policy backing in terms of determining recognized rights (use, transfer, etc), duration (how long?) and assurance of rights. Obviously, it is this deficiency that has led Desalegn (2004) to say "documentation doesn't change the legislation and policy framework governing rights of access to land...user right documentation doesn't entitle the holder to any more rights or benefits than those already included in existing legislation and policy". Filling this vacuum is thus eminent. Though a pledge to halt land redistribution is made in the SDPRP document, it has not so far materialized. Commitment to this pledge entails that it be officially legislated and widely publicized. This could be one of the options that could be considered for urgent policy action.

Further, the certification exercise should be foresighted and should not set unworkable precedent in terms registration and certification cost sharing. Farmers should not be led to believe that land registration and titling is a free lunch. This would be very important in view of more costly and involving undertakings in the future and more importantly the sustainability of land administration in the country, which needs unimpaired and confirmed users commitment.

6. References

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Annex 1. Proposed Content of the Land Register: Amhara National Regional State

No	Entry header	Illustrations of specific information that can be entered	Generic information	
1	Parcel ID number	AE0010100024	Region, zone, district, sub-district codes; land holder and no. of holding codes	
2	Name of owner	AE001010002	Region, zone, district, sub-district codes; land holder code	
3	Central coordinates	North	29902	Applicable when SBH ⁷ is instituted.
		East	22017	
4	Names of farmers having a holding rights of neighboring parcels	East	MinYichil	
		West	Taye	
		North	Demelash	
		South	Kibret	
5	Parcel area	Local init	Gemed	Timad, etc
		Area	5	
6	Current land use/cove	Crop	Wood lot, grazing, homestead	
7	Fertility status	High	High/medium/low	
8	Means of acquisition	Redistribution	Inheritance	
9	Agric. income and rural land use tax	45	Amount in local currency	
10	Area (in ha)	0.45		
11	Address of the land	Village name	Meskele	
		District	A	
		Zone	E	
		Region	001	

Annex 2. Landholders and Family Data

4. Holders full name and address			
4.1 Holders full name			
Name	sex	age	
a. _____	___	___	
b. _____	___	___	
4.2 Guardians full name			
_____	___	___	
4.3 Spouse's full name			
a. _____	___	___	
b. _____	___	___	
4.4 Family members details			
Name	sex	age	relation
a. _____	___	___	_____
b. _____	___	___	_____
c. _____	___	___	_____
4.4 Holder's address			
Region _____	Zone _____	District _____	
Kebele _____	Village _____	Sub-village _____	
5. Holder's ID Number			

⁷ Secondary book of holding

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Solomon ABEBE has about 15 years of professional experience in development planning in Ethiopia. He has served as department head and later as the Head of Bureau of Planning and Economic Development for the Amhara National Regional State in Ethiopia. While serving in this capacity, he has taken part in numerous committees and working groups that also included playing a leadership role in projects financed by major donors like SIDA, FINNIDA, UNCDF, Austria Development Cooperation, etc. He has MSc in Geo-informatics from the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) which he completed it with a thesis entitled A Framework for Developing Geographic Information Infrastructure to Support Land Use Planning in Ethiopia. He has also attended short-term training at Korea Rural Economic Institute and in Canada on Strategic Information Management. At the moment he is doing a PhD research at IVFL, BOKU that looks into the relevance of high-resolution satellite images in documenting land rights.

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