

Land Tenure in Eritrea

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SUMMARY

Eritrea is an agrarian economy and land is the basic resource for its overall development. Land tenure in Eritrea, as in many other African countries, was mainly communal; kinship or village owned. The third type of land tenure was the demaniale or state ownership introduced during the Italian rule. The first two communal types of land tenure had merits in maintaining relative equity within the village and kinship. The kinship-owned allowed the emergence of land market around urban areas. Despite the stated merits, communal ownership was to a great extent a cause for fragmentation of land, soil erosion, over grazing, over harvesting of forests, gross mismanagement of land, which hindered agricultural development and long term investment in land. The State of Eritrea, understanding these critical constraint to development, stated in its Macro-policy (1994) the overall development objectives: the creation of modern technically advanced and internationally competitive economy with the objectives of encouraging long-term investments in agriculture and environmental management, assuring women's right to land on equal basis with men, and modernizing agriculture. Hence, the land policy with the objective of economic development, social justice and equity, security of tenure, political stability, etc was issued. It was followed by land legislation with the objective of reforming the land tenure system. The Eritrean land tenure system had to undergo reforms that assure agricultural and industrial development; promote initiative and motivation among beneficiaries and producers; encourage private investment and initiative; avoid land dispute; ascertain access rights of all citizens to improve their living standards; and make it uniform and applicable throughout the nation. And thus the Land Law was promulgated stating ownership of land by the state. This paper briefly states country geography and history, the communal land tenure systems in Eritrea, the motives behind land reform, main features of the Land Law, land administration functions and global land administration perspectives.