



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C.

UN Commission on Sustainable Development 16-17
Thematic Discussion: Land
Intervention for May 7, Afternoon Session

Check Against Delivery

Intervention given by: **Keri Holland**, Science and Foreign Affairs Officer, Sustainable Development and Multilateral Affairs Division, Office of Environmental Policy, Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science, U.S. Department of State

Good afternoon. In the next few moments, I will describe a few of the approaches to land management that we are using to promote on-the-ground results here in the United States and overseas. Please note that some of these programs are more fully described in the case studies that are available as attachments to this intervention.

Chapter 10 of Agenda 21 lays out the broad objective of our work here today, namely “...facilitate allocation of land to the uses that provide the greatest sustainable benefits and to promote the transition to a sustainable and integrated management of land resources.” At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, we increased the emphasis on land tenure as a critical element to ending poverty. Since then, there have been some successes but we still have much more work to do.

But let us focus for a few moments on recent land trends that are encouraging. I would like to highlight a few:

- As pointed out in the Report of the Secretary General, the historical decline in temperate forests has been reversed, with an annual increase of 30,000 square kilometers between 1990 and 2005, but there are significant sub-national and local cases masked by national and international data.
- Payment-for-environmental services programs are becoming more common. It is right in this watershed of New York City that one of the most successful programs exists. New York City has been able to avoid building a \$6 billion drinking water filtration plant by negotiating land acquisition, easements and other agreements with residents of the nearby watershed to maintain open spaces that provide water filtration at much less cost than building the filtration plant.
- Organizations such as the American Farmland Trust in the United States are finding success in protecting more than a million acres of America’s best farm and ranch land that is close to where Americans live, coupled with efforts by land trusts related to forest easements and associated efforts.
- The U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation is actively engaged with
 - Mongolia to privatize and register household land plots;

- Madagascar to establish municipal land registration offices to issue ownership certificates;
 - Nicaragua to prepare cadastral mapping and conduct title regularization;
 - Mozambique to strengthen land registration services and invest in a land fund that provides support to customary communities;
 - Lesotho to register household land plots and to support a new Land Bill;
 - Niger to increase awareness about land registration and to make procedures for land titling more efficient;
 - In Benin, Mali, El Salvador, Burkina Faso, and Namibia, MCC is working with counterparts to address aspects of land tenure;
 - In Lesotho, Mali and Nicaragua, gender equity has been incorporated into land activity project design. Gender issues are integrated throughout MCC's portfolio of projects.
- The U.S. Agency for International Development is also addressing land issues on a widespread basis.
 - In Ethiopia, a sound land certification system that provides enforceable tenure security in land and related natural resources;
 - In Bolivia, a low-cost model to title and register over 600,000 hectares;
 - In Sudan, protecting and formalizing customary rights to land and resources;
 - In Eastern European, developing land markets;
 - In East Timor, improving land policies and practices.

Land is one of the most important assets for people throughout the world. It is a source of food and income generation, as well as social and cultural identity and a source of ecosystem services. Clear and enforceable property rights and secure tenure of land and property are fundamental underpinnings for economic growth and stability whether people live in urban or rural areas. They promote more efficient and productive land use and more sustainable resource management. They are the cornerstone of functioning markets (credit, rental, labor, etc.), can increase the incentive for investment and reduce a primary trigger of conflict.

Statutory property systems can provide valuable transparency, flexibility and accessibility, but should strive to work in concert with customary norms and practices of local communities and indigenous groups. Land and property rights can be held by individuals, families, communities and other corporate or community structures. Research shows that increasing women's land tenure security improves their incomes, and leads to increased household spending on healthcare, nutritious foods and children's education. Moreover, women's ability to inherit and possess control rights to land is also a social safety net.

Some of the principles the United States has learned in addressing land tenure issues are:

1. Clarify property rights to reduce potential conflict over land and natural resources.
2. Provide incentives for sustainable management by securing property rights.
3. Pay particular attention to the duration and enforceability of rights.

4. Recognize and build on customary property rights, being aware of the characteristic flexibility of customary systems.
5. Secondary use rights (such as grazing in off-season or gathering wood) are often critical sources of livelihood, especially for women, and should be taken into account when formalizing property systems.
6. Avoid displacement (reduction or elimination of property rights) wherever possible.
7. Strengthen local institutions to manage and enforce rights.
8. Recognize the diversity of solutions.
9. Promote property rights regimes that allow for equity as well as efficiency.
10. Where possible promote solutions that go beyond efficiency and equity; empowerment of women, indigenous peoples and the rural poor can bring many long-term benefits.

It should be emphasized that all of these just named land principles, while oriented today toward rural areas, can also be applied to great effect in the rapidly urbanizing regions of the world, where they will prove just as useful. Land is land: discussions on this issue should reflect its unique and critical importance to people's lives whether they live in the city or in the countryside.

Thank you.