Social Assessment Identifies Land Management Concerns in Côte d'Ivoire

Rural areas in Côte d'Ivoire account for 55 percent of the total population. Rural people rely heavily on export- and food-crop production as their primary source of livelihood. However, 71 percent of the rural population live below the poverty line. A general lack of new initiatives and investment opportunities has provoked an upsurge in rural-urban migration, especially among youth. Prevailing constraints are further aggravated when delivery and support systems do not exist or are distorted by bureaucratic and cultural determinants. State intervention in rural areas has led to a crisis in the local and traditional modes of governance and created an acute situation of rural dependency.

The Government of Côte d'Ivoire (GOCI) and the World Bank agree that access to land and natural resource management are critical factors in coping with the rural crisis. The GOCI invited the Bank to help meet the rural development challenge through a new project, the Rural Land Management and Infrastructure Project (PNGTER). The project was designed as one component of a nationwide decentralization program, and it seeks to suggest new approaches for local resource management.

Social Assessment

The social assessment (SA) aimed to: (a) identify the social development concerns and stakeholders relevant to the project; (b) undertake an institutional analysis that examines the regulatory and organizational framework; and (c) define a participation framework for stakeholders in the identification, design, and implementation of local development plans.

Several basic steps were followed in carrying out the SA. First, the social space where different actors articulate their claims and defend their rights to land and other land-based resources was conceptually determined. Second, key stakeholders and vulnerable populations were identified and associated with reported patterns of land conflicts. Next, an institutional analysis was conducted to assess the regulatory framework and the organizational structure required for devolution of power to local stakeholders and effective management of rural infrastructure. This note captures the findings of the provisional SA process at the project identification stage and raises a number of new issues that need to be addressed through the SA process during the pre-appraisal, appraisal, and implementation stages.

Key Social Development Concerns

The key social development concerns identified by the SA were access, control, and management of land rights. The SA also assessed the potential for an eruption of conflict when indigenous landlords attempt to dispossess migrants of their access rights to land, or when landlords discover that the latter occupy more land than was provided in the initial grant. The SA assumed that clarification of land rights will secure tenure rights and thus lead to better land management, eventually producing greater long-term investment in land. However, this land clarification process will also gradually transform customary land-tenure laws.

Under customary principles of tenure, land cannot be alienated by sale. Consequently there is no local institutional framework for land transmission.

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through market mechanisms. The state land-delivery mechanism, based on the land registration process for a title deed, is out of reach for most peasants. Local land transactions are therefore not supported by any legal document. Moreover, if the certification of use rights to land has to take the form of titling, then some of the major stakeholders—specifically migrants from Mali and Burkina Faso—will be losers, as the state is reticent to give land titles to foreigners.

The distinction between the nontransmissibility of land through market instruments and the ability to sell use rights in the forest is another important concern, and affects the mode of institutionalization of these rights. The SA raised the question of how best to proceed with land registration once land use rights are clarified. It found that since access rights to land and other productive resources are usually recorded in the name of the male head of household, women, youth, and nomadic pastoralists may fall through the cracks of the system if a land titling approach is adopted.

**Institutional Issues**

Two levels of institutional issues are relevant to the SA. At the micro level, the SA provides a snapshot in time of the institutional arrangements for land, which are constantly evolving. It recognizes existing patterns of land management, and represents a key transitional phase that records existing rights to land, and might facilitate the movement from communal ownership with individual use rights to the recognition of individual occupation. At the community level, rural councils are expected to play a pivotal role in articulating the framework of rural development planning as a result of decentralization. The extent to which these new institutions can ensure the project’s development agenda depends on the acceptance of a mapping of rural villages into decentralized local communities and the internal level of coherence and ability of the units to design and take full ownership of development initiatives at the local level.

**Participation Framework**

Defining the participation framework for the proposed project requires two steps. First, providing local communities with the required skills to participate actively in the design of their local development plans and to ensure their implementation; and second, establishing a committed technical unit to back up the planning exercise at the local level. It is also clear from a linkage analysis that to enhance the project’s development effectiveness, the participation framework should capitalize on existing networks of social capital in rural areas and integrate the urban elite in development planning. The next steps of the SA should include a further definition of the framework of participation for key stakeholders. Specifically, it is strongly recommended that a willingness/ability to pay study be conducted in some pilot cases. The anticipated output should provide an empirical base for establishing the eligibility criteria for rural funds (FRAR) available from the project to finance rural infrastructure proposals from local communities.

**Next Steps**

The next step in the SA process should be to assess the political will of the current regime to effectively decentralize decisionmaking powers and management prerogatives to local decentralized bodies. This political will could be assessed by (a) determining the willingness of the regime to deliver village/collective land titles to the newly created rural decentralized communities, to be administered by the rural councils; (b) putting in place mechanisms and regulations that allow local communities to participate in the design, implementation, and maintenance of local investments; and (c) creating appropriate delivery systems to finance and provide technical support to local communities. Furthermore, to enhance the effectiveness of the rural funding mechanism as a vehicle to finance rural development projects in the context of the project, it is recommended that a willingness/ability to pay study be conducted in some pilot cases.

To further enhance local ownership of the project, a more detailed stakeholder analysis should be conducted to establish some of the systemic and cultural factors that account for the vulnerability of certain groups (especially women and youth). In addition, to provide a strong institutional and organizational framework for the project, an organization and manpower study should be conducted to determine (a) the new organizational framework required to enable rural communities to become effective in development planning and implementation; (b) the skills-mix needed to carry out their mission, and (c) institutional arrangements linking these rural communities to other higher levels of the state structure.

Finally, a framework for monitoring and evaluation should be prepared. This will require developing different sets of indicators to monitor variations in landholding, performance indicators, and other process indicators, as well as the establishment of local organizational units to record changes to existing property rights before these are systematically reported to a registry office.