

## Burkina Faso to Prioritise Land Policy Development and Implementation – Minister

Ouagadougou, 16 April 2008 – Secure land tenure is a necessary precondition to increasing agricultural output and ensuring food security in Africa, according to H.E. Laurent Sedogo, the minister of agriculture, water and fisheries of the Republic of Burkina Faso.

The minister made the remarks Tuesday 15 April, while opening a three-day regional consultative workshop on land policies in West Africa taking place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Minister Sedogo said land policy issues was one of the most difficult policy challenges that Africa faces, and impacts not only food production, but peace and security and overall economic development.

The minister also informed the workshop that Burkina Faso initiated its own process of agrarian reform in 2003 to identify medium and long-term solutions to land policy challenges in the country. "The Government of Burkina Faso has made it a priority to solve land policy issues, which is why it is very interested in this initiative," the minister said.

He said Burkina Faso was ready to share its experiences in developing land policies, and learn from other African countries. He encouraged the workshop to look beyond the formulation of land policies and address implementation, "as the population needs concrete measures to guarantee and protect their land, reduce conflicts and arrest degradation."

Also speaking at the opening, the director of semi-arid food grain research and development (SAFGRAD) at the African Union, Dr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, hailed the collaboration between the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the African Union Commission (AUC) that led to this land policy initiative.

He stated that five sub-regional consultative workshops will take place in East, West Central, North and South Africa. The final outcome of the five workshops will be used to arrive at a continental land policy framework and guidelines, which will be presented to a summit of African Heads of States and Governments next year for endorsement and implementation.

Representing the African Development Bank, Mrs Antoinette Dinga-Dzonzo, said the land policy initiative demonstrated the positive collaboration that exists among the leading African institutions, civil society organisations and development partners to tackle a major development challenge facing the African continent.

"Land has a key role and should contribute to the prosperity of the continent and poverty reduction which is one of the key objectives of the bank," she said.

Inclusive and appropriate land challenges are necessary in order for Africa to position itself and take advantage of the increasing price of primary products, she said.

The director of ECA's food security and sustainable development division, Dr. Josué Dioné, stated that the increasing urbanisation in Africa, with a projection that over 50% of the continent's citizens will live in urban areas by 2030, is adding pressure and insecurity on urban land. He cautioned that land rights of urban slum dwellers must also be recognised and low-cost methods of acquiring and documenting these rights developed.

Noting that several tenure systems still exist on the continent, he said: "We must provide guidance to our governments on legal and institutional mechanisms of ensuring an effective coexistence of formal and customary systems of land tenure."

Representing the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Jean-Pierre Renson, stated that more than 300 million people in Africa live on less than two US dollars a day, and that poverty is concentrated in rural areas, where poor farmers have very little access to land.

Noting that the challenges are very complex and politically sensitive, he said there are no quick fixes, and added that he was encouraged by the fact that African governments are tackling the issue seriously.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) representative, Mr. Norman Messer, saluted the efforts being taken at national levels in Africa in developing land policies.

"National governments are the driving force on land policies and this initiative will add to leading role of national governments," he said. He also commended the role being played by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and civil society organisations in complementing efforts of member states.

The workshop is being organised in collaboration with the Government of Burkina Faso, FAO, IFAD, ECOWAS, Rockefeller Foundation and the Comité Permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS). It is expected to arrive at the critical issues on land policy in the sub-region, which will be an input to continental land policy guidelines and a framework for implementation.

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