Research topics : detailed problematics

The two selected themes refer to key questions for the understanding of land tenure dynamics and the debate on land tenure policies (and renewable resources management) as well as operational strategies in these sectors. Recent works on land tenure transactions and land tenure markets must be taken into account. However, this knowledge remains incomplete. Policy and project design processes have been under-researched and there is a lack of detailed empirical analyses. The expected proposals – limited research operations rather than big scale projects – will rely on in-depth empirical material and/or bring a real theoretical added value.

1. Dynamics of land tenure transactions; importance and impact of urban interests in rural and peri-urban areas

Monetarised or not, land tenure transactions (loans, sharecropping, sales, renting, etc.) expand. Yet, beyond theoretical models, the concrete forms of these transactions, as well as the stakeholders, regulation modalities, economic and social impact, remain poorly documented. This is particularly true in places where these transactions used to be strictly forbidden (agrarian reform sites, State irrigation schemes) or where they are new – for instance in regions where customary norms have prohibited them until recently, or in the case of newly de-collectivised agriculture, where land redistribution made them re-emerge. Moreover, due to "imperfect" access to credit, to commercial outlets, etc., the expansion of land tenure markets does not always generate the expected effects in terms of economic efficiency and equity. In most regions, the wealthiest actors, local and non-local urban actors, migrants or even the local elite, buy land with various objectives (farming businesses, speculation, complementary income, etc.), from poor families having financial problems. These urban land tenure interests in rural areas, as well as the role of the firms, are often strongly underestimated from both the quantitative and qualitative point of view, as well as their impact on social differentiation and land tenure inequalities. The massive migrations have also often contributed to the expansion of commoditised transactions.

The objective of the works on this issue is a better understanding of how to favour secured land tenure transactions reconciling economic efficiency and equity. Particular attention will be paid to dynamic agricultural and peri-urban areas. Therefore, on a range of sites chosen for their relevance we will analyse the following:

- the effective dynamics of land transactions, their economic and social rationale and impact, especially for the marginalised social groups;
- the problems they can pose in terms of tenure security;
- the current hold and logic of the urban investors; the compared productivities of different types of enterprise.

The concrete transaction processes, and thus the real functioning of the land transactions markets, remain insufficiently known. This is particularly true regarding the social/non-land tenure dimensions, namely the influence of social networks, patron-client ties, various intermediary actors and brokers… Different dimensions will be explored:

- Actors involved: local actors involved and their social status, middlemen, civil servants, local or extra-local actors, etc.
- Contents of the transaction, attention paid to social, non-tenure clauses (role for the reproduction of the relation and thus, the maintenance of access), degree of commoditisation , local categorisation, time span.
- Significance of the transaction for the stakeholders (especially regarding "sales": degree of irreversibility). Does the existence or the development of monetarised transactions signify the end of customary regulations, or do they work within the customary framework? Can they be observed equally on all land types and regardless of the local land tenure status and why?
- Process. The current analyses of land transactions markets deal little with the concrete transaction processes, with the way they take place: How do the interactions get organised between actors? Or how intermediaries act as gatekeepers between the assignor and the taker? How do actors access information? How does the negotiation take place? What are the arguments, etc.?
- Norms. What types of norms do the markets generate, use and/or favour? The aim is to show in particular that the so-called "customary" norms are not inherently resistant to commoditisation. How are these norms used in the transactions?

In this framework, the following issues should be tackled:

- Impact on the distribution of landed resources. Do we observe an increasing land concentration or can temporary transactions (derived rights) contain these processes, keeping access open to all categories of actors.
- Role of the urban actors on the rural land markets. Types of actors (individual entrepreneurs, firms, politicians, nationals or non-nationals), modes of access to the land (clientelistic networks, corruption, development aid, local belonging, etc.), uses of the land (speculative or productive), relations with the rural populations (labour and land transactions market/agrarian contracts), etc.
- Specificities of the peri-urban frontier. How do rural lands (agricultural, forest and pastoral) turn into urban areas and building plots, with regards to the functioning of the land transaction markets? What are their specificities (actors, transaction modes, regulation types, etc.)?
- Specificity of the areas of strong State intervention or development projects. Especially cases where commercial transactions have been banned (agrarian reform sites, State irrigation schemes, etc.): did they informally re-emerge before an eventual legalisation, etc. ?

1. 2. The crafting of land tenure policies. The nature and dynamics of the actors' interplay

The concrete production processes of land tenure policies (what is politically and economically at stake, actors' logics, lobbies and formal or informal negotiations, the effective role of research and expertise, etc.) remain largely unknown most of the time. The objective of this theme is to understand the concrete processes through which policies develop, in order to identify the action levers and provide more efficient supporting strategies to the land tenure actors for more appropriate and more inclusive land tenure policies. Based on a sample of land tenure reforms or newly initiated field operations, the process steps and actors involved will be analysed: the decision of initiating a reform or launching an operation, the definition of the orientations, the elaboration of texts and implementation modalities, etc. in order to understand the concrete influences exerted by the various actors: political power, line administrations, political parties, South and North experts, donors, farmers' organisations, etc.

In a context where the role of organised citizens is increasingly acknowledged, in which participative actions for drafting texts are encouraged without any clear indication regarding methods, particuliar attention will be paid to the existence or absence of organisations or lobbies defending specific interests, farmers' organisations, hometown associations, NGOs, etc., to the social categories they stand for, to their action, to the way they try, and with what strategies and what success, to influence political and operational choices.

The concrete production processes of land tenure policies still remain poorly documented, because of, among other things, the ever strong influence of the linear models of conception/decision/action/assessment and because of the lack of in-depth empirical studies. A plurality of dimensions has to be considered for an analytical reappraisal centred on social processes and actors' logics :

- Identifying the involved actors. Various actors play a part in the different steps of the process, according to various registers and with different impacts (administrations, members of parliament, governments, donors, experts, NGOs, researchers, organisations and associations).
- Explicit and implicit agendas. They depend, among other things, on the actors involved. Are they economic, political or identity issues? Or is social peace at stake?
- Texts and discourses. Policies rely on - or at least produce - texts and discourses which should be analysed, and their relevance (internal and mutual) studied as well as their real uses.
- Decision-making place and process. Where and how are directions defined and choices made? In which official or non-official arenas? And where and in which context can these choices be contested, if need be, and alternative proposals developed?
- Time dimension of the processes. We very often observe changes in pace (speeding up, or even haste or temporary stand-by), telescoping or "inver-

sions" of steps, and interference with other procedures of policy making. A chronology should be established, the reasons for these movements analysed and their effects assessed.

These various dimensions can only be dealt with independently from each other with difficulty. It seems appropriate to approach them with specific case studies (implementation of agrarian reforms, new land laws, operations of "customary" rights identification and recognition, codes and conventions for natural resources management, etc.).

It seems essential in this context to explore several issues:

- The processes - formal or informal - of debate and negotiation about choices.
- The methodological questions. The implementation of identification policies of the so-called "customary" rights is confronted by methodological questions, similar to those met by the rural land tenure plans.
- The role of expertise. Foreign and national "experts" are often, sometimes ill-advisedly, in demand, at different steps of the development processes. It is essential to assess their exact role within the institutional configuration and also in terms of the supply and demand and usage of the expertise.
- The participation of the "civil society". Participation is invoked on all occasions, generating ambivalence and misunderstandings. It is necessary to investigate the forms of participation of the "civil society" associations and organisations in the production process of public policies - participation in their development, lobbying, protesting, consultation, absence or "pretextual participation" (without any preparation or clear agenda).