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SUMMARY

A NEW PROPERTY REGIME IN KYRGYZSTAN; AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LINKS BETWEEN LAND REFORM, FOOD SECURITY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mass media regularly remind us that in various parts of the world people still live with continuous food shortages. Consulting activities in economics, geodesy, and law carried out mainly in poorer rural areas of so called lesser-developed countries in the world made me aware of food insecurity as daily reality, not as a passing news item. It fuelled my interest for research into the links between land reform, food security and economic development.

The common expectation is that land reform will result in economic development based on the assumption that the value of land increases which stimulates people to develop the highest possible productivity of land and thus enhances economic development. Another notion is that land reform aimed at individual land tenure and a higher level of tenure security for individual farmers, will lead to higher agricultural production. Relatively smaller farms use the land in a more productive way, resulting in increased food security.

Land reform projects are commonly based on one of these two assumptions. Research findings confirm the assumption but question the also assumed automatism in the link between land reform and economic development or increased food security. There is mounting evidence that a number of conditions have to be fulfilled to achieve these goals by land reform. The conditions are presented in the so-called 'standard model'.

In several lesser-developed countries in transition, land reform projects are currently being considered or in progress, supervised by international donor organizations with assistance of expatriate experts. The terms of reference of projects are specifically politically oriented leaving project staff with rather vague descriptions of their project responsibilities and project tasks, while implementation often presents unexpected and complex problems.

The rapid transition from a command economy to a free market economy requires institutional change. The recipient country needs new institutional provisions resulting in the import of alien 'western style' land tenure systems. Evidence shows that expatriate experts have hardly or no time to investigate the circumstances in the recipient country, while at the same time local experts seldom have the possibility to familiarize with concepts and institutes in the donor country. Besides, projects have fixed termination dates, which are seldom an incentive for expatriate and local project staff to care much about the continuity of project benefits beyond the project duration, because they are generally only employed for the project. Nevertheless many projects show initially project success at audits, but later evaluations reveal disappointing sustainable beneficial effects⁰. A substantial number of the donor supported projects is not sustainable beneficial in the long run. Of course, it is always

⁰ A 1985 World Bank Study of longer term impacts of 25 agricultural projects, shows that all projects seemed successful in project completion audits, but after 5 to 10 years, more than half had not sustained initially-introduced benefits. See also a 1986 assessment of 212 USAID projects (USAID Program Evaluation Discussion Paper # 24) showing that 11% had a strong probability of being sustained after U.S. assistance ended and 25% had poor prospects for sustainability.

difficult to know whether a certain project fulfils the requirement of future needs; criteria for success are difficult to define, while realistic, helpful assessment methods are time consuming. One reason is that both food security and economic prosperity cannot be measured directly. Both are complex subjective experiences. Moreover, land tenure security is an extremely subjective perception.

In my research of links between land tenure, food security and economic development research results of others have been reviewed and this supported the development of a double paradigm. One paradigm for the links between land reform and food security and another one for the links between land reform and economic development. Visualizing the two paradigms shows that they can largely be combined into one scheme. Based on this scheme a method for rapid assessment of results of land reform projects is presented in the book. The method – aiming at project staff – follows the linked elements and uses macro-economic indicators to evaluate the development of those elements. It enables project staff to optimize its contribution to the project.

This research is a direct result of an assignment to assist locally with a land registration project in Kyrgyzstan in 1999. This land registration project is part of a larger land and agrarian reform project supported by international donor organizations, which started after the declaration of independence in 1991. In the land and agrarian reform project, land has been redistributed among individuals. Initially land designated for agricultural purposes (the 'Ugodia') was distributed among farmers in a tenure regime characterized by long-term exclusive use only, but since November 1998 land is privatized among individual owners in a 'western style' fashion. Although the emphasis in the research is on Kyrgyzstan, my own experiences in other similar projects elsewhere are widely used.

The method in this research has been applied for a rapid assessment of the land and agrarian reform project in Kyrgyzstan. Several project developments could be evaluated. It will give project staff a tool for better supporting and guiding of the project especially when less desired project developments occur. The method also provides an indication about the effectiveness of reaching the project goal(s).

As an effect of the research the question arises if there would be a possibility to investigate implementation of a more socially oriented tenure regime in a country in transition. In particular in a country currently planning a land reform project. The new land tenure system could have characteristics of long term inheritable use rights adapted to restrictions based on local communal tenure systems and or customs. One might think for example of giving local communities a certain authority to control the exploitation, the use, and the transfer of land or one could imagine a situation in which the individual tenure is dependent on the personal circumstances of the members of the community.