

New frontiers in land and resource tenure research

Conveners:

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There is a long-standing and broad consensus that securing land and natural resource rights is a crucial component for achieving development, as well as for achieving environmental goals related to conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Development policy has usually sought to accelerate economic growth (by accelerating investment and productivity) on the one hand, and on the other hand sought to protect people from the negative effects of economic growth, including exploitation, exclusion and environmental destruction. Since colonial times, land and natural resource tenure policy has in various ways sought to achieve both of these goals, but there have been persistent questions about the ‘reach’ of such policies.

Contemporary land policy continues to use a fairly narrow range of tools both in land administration (registering and titling land to individuals or groups) and land management (making land use plans). When resources have been mobilised for programmes to secure land and natural resource rights, they tend to be set in the context of particular views of development and to favour some approaches and stakeholders at the expense of others. In recent times, some approaches – under rubrics such as “third way”, “new wave” or “community lands” – have aimed to be more inclusive and flexible with the promise of benefits to both local communities and external investors, to sedentary farmers and pastoralists, and providing security of tenure to both communal and individual claimants. The extent to which these initiatives constitute a break with previous, more polarised, approaches remain open to question.

In the spirit of the overall theme for the conference this panel invites papers which in some way reflect new topics, issues, or orientations, of research on land and natural resource tenure in a broad sense of the meaning. Examples of such emerging areas of interest for research on tenure are: *i*) an apparent shift in some land registration and titling programmes from a narrow focus on individualized private plots to more locally adapted and culturally sensitive approaches building on the legal recognition (“formalization”) of customary tenure systems/rights in one form or another; *ii*) the implications of escalating commercial demand for land and other natural resources (forests, minerals, gas, etc.), for the tenure security of local people - both in relation to livelihood protection and to the possibility of mutually beneficial community-investor partnerships, and *iii*) the way that the climate change agenda is re-framing discussion of common-property forest rights, e.g., through linkages made between REDD+ implementation and resource tenure.