



AFRICAN UNION



Economic Commission for Africa

PRESS RELEASE

CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP ON LAND POLICY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA ENDS WITH BROAD AGREEMENTS ON REFORM

Windhoek, Namibia, 31 August 2007 - Stakeholders from civil society, governments, NGOs, development partners and international organizations today ended a three-day Consultative Workshop on Land Policy in Southern Africa with broad agreements on benchmarks and indicators for land policy reform in the sub region.

The workshop was the first of five sub regional assessments planned by a consortium of the African Union Commission (AUC), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), to facilitate land policy reform in Africa and design a framework to secure land rights, enhance productivity and secure livelihoods on the continent.

A regional discussion paper on the assessment of key land issues in the region formed the basis for discussion.

The consultative workshop appreciated the findings of the regional assessment. Participants discussed and ranked the priority land issues from among those in the regional assessment plus those identified during workshop discussions. They identified unequal distribution of land, tenure security, historical colonial legacies, and sustainable management of natural resources as top priorities.

Other land issues identified as important include dualism in property security, sustainable management of the environment, addressing gender biases, managing the impact of HIV and AIDS and managing land in post conflict reconstruction. In addition, other issues of equal importance were identified. These included, absentee landlords, elites acquiring large land holdings, inheritance and land rights for vulnerable groups and integration of land issues with other sectors of the economy.

The participants agreed that all of the identified land issues have strongly influenced economic development in the sub region.

The workshop recognised the need to develop clear guidelines and benchmarks with indicators of good practice for land policy and institutional reforms that would accompany the continental framework and guidelines for land policy. It also

recommended that in the further development and piloting of benchmarks, targets and indicators, the AU, ECA and AfDB should work closely with the SADC Land Facility and the countries in Southern Africa.

Participants acknowledged the importance of knowledge management and lesson sharing as critical to supporting development, implementation and monitoring of land policies. They agreed that they can make use of the existing best practices on land policy and land administration in Southern Africa which can provide good lessons to others.

In addition, the workshop also identified some gaps in land tenure systems which the participants agreed to address. It also pointed out that gaps in human and institutional capacity, especially the failure by governments to retain staff after they have been trained, present a major challenge to land policy reform and should therefore be given priority in the continental policy.

The outcomes of the consultative workshop will, along with outcomes from other regional workshops to be held in Eastern, Northern, Western and Central Africa, will enrich the draft land policy framework and guidelines in preparation for a continental meeting of African experts and ministers responsible for land. The Ministers' report and Recommendations on Land Policy Framework and Guidelines will be subjected to the policy organs of the AU Summit for consideration and adoption.

Thirteen out of the 14 SADC countries attended the workshop.