INDABA AGRICULTURAL POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE IS A LOCAL PRIVATE COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE WHICH WAS FORMED IN 2011. IT’S AN AGRICULTURAL POLICY ANALYSIS, CAPACITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH INSTITUTE FORMED OUT OF THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY’S FOOD SECURITY RESEARCH PROJECT (1999 TO 2011).

SMALLHOLDER LAND TENURE AND PRODUCTIVITY IS ONE OF THE ACTIVITY THE INSTITUTE WORKS UNDER THE THEMATIC AREA “SMALLHOLDER PRODUCTIVITY”. OTHER THEMATIC AREAS ARE:

1) AGRICULTURAL TRADE AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT;
2) PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND POLICY;
3) AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NUTRITION;
4) CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL RESOURCES; AND
5) EMERGING ISSUES – RESPONDING TO STAKEHOLDER NEEDS.

BY CLASSIFICATION, SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN ZAMBIA ARE LARGELY THOSE CULTIVATING LESS THAN 20 HECTARES, WHILE THOSE CULTIVATING MORE ARE EITHER EMERGING OR LARGE SCALE COMMERCIAL FARMERS. THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF LAND TENURE SYSTEMS IN ZAMBIA, STATELAND (WITH TITLE DEEDS) AND CUSTOMARY (ADMINISTERED BY TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES).

IT IS A PLEASURE TO SHARE WITH YOU THIS MORNING THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INSTITUTE’S FINDINGS ON SMALLHOLDER LAND TENURE AND PRODUCTIVITY. DETAILS OF THE PUBLICATIONS ON THIS IMPORTANT TOPIC CAN BE ACCESSED
THE EFFECT OF LAND TENURE SYSTEMS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AND GROWTH IN AFRICA HAS LONG BEEN A TOPIC OF ANALYSIS AND DEBATE. PROONENTS OF LAND TITLING ARGUE THAT THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF FORMAL PROPERTY RIGHTS, IN PARTICULAR THE LIMITED SHARE OF LAND ADMINISTERED THROUGH STATUTORY TITLE DOCUMENTS, HINDERS AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT BY MAINTAINING LAND AS A “DEAD ASSET”. THE ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF LAND TITLING AS A MEANS OF TRIGGERING AGRICULTURAL GROWTH HINGES ON THREE POTENTIAL ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES OF TITLE DEEDS RELATIVE TO INFORMAL OWNERSHIP OR UTILISATION LAND RIGHTS:

1) A LEGAL TITLE TO LAND CAN BE USED AS COLLATERAL TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO CREDIT FOR AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENTS;

2) LAND TITLE CAN INCREASE THE SECURITY OF TENURE FOR FARMERS, WHICH MAY MAKE THEM MORE WILLING TO MAKE MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS IN LAND, SUCH AS IRRIGATION SYSTEMS OR SOIL IMPROVEMENTS; AND

3) LAND TITLES MAY ENABLE THE FORMALIZATION OF THE LAND MARKETS, WHICH HELPS TO TRANSFER LAND TO MORE PRODUCTIVE USERS.

IT’S NO WONDER THAT THE CONVERSION OF CUSTOMARY LAND TO LEASEHOLD TITLE REMAINS A CENTRAL COMPONENT OF ZAMBIA’S LAND ADMINISTRATION AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY. THE 1995 LAND ACT ESTABLISHES MECHANISMS TO TRANSFER CUSTOMARY OWNERSHIP TO STATUTORY LEASEHOLD TITLE, AND TO THEREBY FACILITATE MARKET VALUATION OF LAND.

IN PRACTICE, THE LAND ACT, COUPLED WITH PREVIOUS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE SMALLHOLDER COMMERCIALIZATION THROUGH TITLING SCHEMES AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, HAS ENABLED A RELATIVELY SMALL SUB-SEGMENT OF THE ZAMBIAN SMALLHOLDER POPULATION TO ACQUIRE TITLE TO THEIR LAND. ACCORDING TO NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE
SMALLHOLDER SURVEY DATA, 8.4% OF SMALLHOLDER HOUSEHOLDS HAVE TITLE TO THEIR LAND, WITH ROUGHLY 9.8% OF SMALLHOLDER LAND ADMINISTERED UNDER TITLE. YET THE POVERTY REDUCTION AND AGRICULTURAL GROWTH IMPLICATIONS OF SMALLHOLDER LAND TITLING IN ZAMBIA REMAIN UNCLEAR.

ZAMBIA HAS A TOTAL LAND AREA OF 74 MILLION HECTARES AND A POPULATION OF ABOUT 15 MILLION PEOPLE, GIVING IT ONE OF THE LOWEST POPULATION DENSITIES IN THE WORLD: 5 HA/PERSON. 94% OF ZAMBIA’S LAND IS SAID TO BE UNDER CUSTOMARY RULE AND BY IMPLICATION, IS THOUGHT TO BE AVAILABLE TO SMALLHOLDER FARMING. A LOT OF THE LAND IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR SETTLEMENT OR FARMING AS IT IS TAKEN BY LAKES/RIVERS/PLAINS/SWAMPS/GAME PARKS/GAME MANAGEMENT AREAS, AND EVEN FOREST RESERVES UNLESS DE-GAZETTED.

USING AVAILABLE GEOSPATIAL DATA, WE ESTIMATE THAT THE AMOUNT OF CUSTOMARY LAND AVAILABLE FOR SMALLHOLDER UTILIZATION 54%, FAR LESS THAN THE FIGURE THAT IS FREQUENTLY UTILIZED IN LAND POLICY DOCUMENTS.

IN FACT, 54% OF SMALLHOLDER FARMERS STATE THAT THERE IS NO LAND IN THEIR VILLAGE THAT HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN CLAIMED BY SOMEONE ELSE. IN ADDITION, 64% OF ZAMBIAN SMALLHOLDERS OWN LESS THAN 2 HECTARES OF LAND, APPROXIMATELY 900,000 RURAL HOUSEHOLDS! 73% CULTIVATE LESS THAN 2 HECTARES OF LAND.

HIGH POVERTY RATES ARE CONCENTRATED AMONG THESE SMALLER FARMS. 83% OF FARMERS WITH LESS THAN 2 HECTARES OF LAND LIVE ON LESS THAN A DOLLAR PER PERSON PER DAY. ADDRESSING RURAL POVERTY REQUIRES DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE INCOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARMERS WITH LESS THAN 2 HECTARES. OUR RESEARCH EVIDENCE SHOW THAT INCREASING LAND ACCESS FOR SMALLHOLDERS FROM 2 TO 3 HECTARES’ KEEPING ALL OTHER FACTORS CONSTANT, CAN LEAD TO AN INCREASE IN
AGRICULTURAL SALES AND A DECREASE IN POVERTY RATES FROM OVER 80% TO UNDER 50%!

THE PARADOX OF SMALLHOLDER FARMERS FACING LAND CONSTRAINTS IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY ARISES FROM THE TENDENCE TO SETTLE IN AREAS WHERE THERE IS INFRASTRUCTURE, ESPECIALLY ALONG THE LINE OF RAIL AND MAJOR ROADS. LAND CONSTRAINTS ARE INCREASED BY LAND ACQUISITIONS BY URBAN ZAMBIANS. MANY URBAN ZAMBIANS ARE ACQUIRING TITLE TO LAND THAT WAS ONCE UNDER CUSTOMARY RULE. MUCH OF THIS LAND ACQUISITION IS SPECULATIVE, NOT PRODUCTIVE. OUR ANALYSIS SHOWS THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH TITLE TO THEIR LAND EARN 137% LESS INCOME FROM AGRICULTURE THAN FARMERS ON CUSTOMARY LAND, BECAUSE MOST OF THEM ARE NOT REALLY (ABSENT) FARMERS. ACCESS TO TITLING OF FARMLAND IS SKewed TOWARDS SPECULATIVE INVESTORS, RATHER THAN PRODUCTIVE SMALLHOLDER FARMERS. SMALLHOLDER FARMERS THAT ACQUIRE TITLE TO FARMLAND TEND TO BE WEALTHIER THAN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY INHABITANTS.

THEREFORE, THE SYSTEMS FOR ALLOCATING LAND TITLES TO SMALLHOLDERS IN ZAMBIA DO NOT APPEAR TO BE LEADING TO THE SORTS OF BENEFICIAL CHANGES IN SMALLHOLDER PRODUCTION SYSTEMS AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES NEEDED TO DRIVE PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH AND AGRICULTURAL-LED POVERTY REDUCTION. TO THE CONTRARY, OUR FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT SMALLHOLDERS WITH TITLE TO THEIR LAND ARE LIKELY TO EARN SIGNIFICANTLY LESS AGRICULTURAL INCOME. OUR ANALYSIS SUGGEST THAT THE NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAND TITLE AND AGRICULTURAL INCOME IS THE RESULT OF INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR AWARDING LAND TITLE IN ZAMBIA THAT HAVE DEVELOPED OVER TIME. THESE ARRANGEMENTS ARE IMPLICITLY OR EXPLICITLY DESIGNED TO EXCLUDE EXISTING FARMERS IN CUSTOMARY AREAS FROM ACCESSING LAND TITLE, WHILE FAVOURING INDIVIDUALS FROM OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY WHO ARE NOT PRIMARILY FARMERS. A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF INDIVIDUALS
ACQUIRING LAND TITLES ARE PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES UTILIZING THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS AND INCOMES TO ACQUIRE TITLED LAND.

ULTIMATELY, THE NEGATIVE OUTCOMES OF LAND TITLING FOR SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE ARE THE RESULT OF INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS THAT FAVOUR ELITE CAPTURE OF LAND OVER MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE SMALLHOLDER FARMING COMMUNITY.

THEREFORE, ZAMBIA’S SYSTEM FOR ALLOCATING TITLED LAND FOR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES MUST BE REALIGNED IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE PRODUCTIVE, RATHER THAN SPECULATIVE ACQUISITION OF TITLED LAND. THIS MAY ENTAIL PROVIDING CLEAR MECHANISMS TO ENABLE EXISTING SMALLHOLDERS TO OBTAIN TITLE TO THEIR LAND. CENTRAL TO THIS IS LOWERING THE TRANSACTION COSTS AND BUREAUCRATIC COMPLEXITY OF ACQUIRING TITLE TO LAND.

A SIMPLE STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING THIS GOAL WOULD BE TO COMBINE AN EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN ABOUT LAND TITLING WITH THE DECENTRALIZATION OF THE TITLING PROCESS TO ENABLE TITLES TO BE OBTAINED IN PROVINCIAL OR DISTRICT CENTRES. PERHAPS A MORE TRANSPARENT PROCESS IS WHERE AWARDING OF TITLES TO LAND IS DONE IN A MORE PARTICIPATORY MANNER AT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY LEVEL.

BY ADDRESSING THE INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS THAT LIMIT EXISTING FARMERS’ ACCESS TO LAND TITLE, ZAMBIA MAY BE ABLE TO ENCOURAGE THE Sorts OF BENEFICIAL CHANGES IN SMALLHOLDER PRODUCTION ENVISAGED BY PROONENTS OF LAND TITLING IN AFRICA. MORE IMPORTANTLY, LAND POLICY IN ZAMBIA MUST BE ADDRESSED IN ORDER TO ALLOW OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS OF FARMERS TO ACQUIRE THE LAND THEY NEED TO DERIVE A LIVING FROM FARMING.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION


