

Perspective of Land Reform in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

Rwanda is a hilly and evergreen country located in East Africa, between the 1°04' and 2°51' Southern Latitudes and between the 28°53' and 30°53' Eastern Longitudes. The shortest route to the ocean is 1,200 km long.

Rwanda has an area of 26,338 km² with an estimated population of about 8 millions inhabitant, giving an overall population density of more than 300 people per km². Arable land is estimated at 1,3 million hectares. Marshlands are estimated at 165,000 hectares from which only the half is available for agricultural purpose.

Rwanda has also three main natural reserves as National Parks:

- The Volcano National Park where live the worldwide known mountains gorillas;
- The Akagera National Park and
- The Nyungwe National Park recently created as park to protect the natural fauna and flora.

In Rwanda, Land is one of the most important and fundamental natural resource. The land resource is the foundation of the national economy through agriculture which occupies more than 90% of Rwandan in rural area. However, problems related to land in Rwanda are varied. The main are the following:

- Very high population density and an extreme pressure on land, a shortage of cultivation land per household with an average of 0.6ha, when a cultivation plot economically viable per a household for Rwanda should be at least 0.90 ha, according to FAO.
- Land degradation particularly due to soil erosion and over exploitation by the dominated agricultural sector without restitution of nutrients and without any specialisation of both human beings and equipment
- Disastrous effects of war and genocide of 1994 with orphans and widows who can not manage properly the land let by their deceased parents and husbands
- A land system dominated by customary law which favours land partitioning through father to son inheritance
- Land system unfavourable to women and female children
- Insufficiency of human and material resources.

However, reforms have been engaged to ensure proper land management in the Country and following actions have been conducted:

- To put in place institutions dealing with land concerns like the Ministry of Lands, Human Settlement and Environmental Protection since 1999.
- To develop a National Land Policy and a new Land Law to promote a good management of land resource and to ensure security of land tenure system. The main innovations in the National Land Policy and the new Land Law are: - the legal framework regulating land registration and the delivery of land title representing an long term lease hold of 99 years and a legal framework regulating physical planning as a basic tool for proper land management and land administration.
- To propose an establishment of a centralized and computerized National Land Information System in order to facilitate the development of an accurate and complete database on land which is essential to conduct a proper and an efficient land management. The land survey process will be conducted by the National Land Survey of Rwanda which is proposed to be created. This Centre should have branches in each District for the processing of cadastral surveying and delivery of documents that support registration of land titles. Within the decentralisation process, Districts will be strengthened in terms of human capacity and required equipment to be able to achieve their objectives related to land management and land administration.
- To develop a National Settlement Policy with adoption of villages “*IMIDUGUDU*” as new model of settlement in rural areas. This policy will help to develop agricultural activities and to create other socio-economic activities.
- To propose the establishment of an environmental body called: “*Rwanda Environment Management Authority*” which will be focused on all technical aspects of environmental protection in general and a proper land management for a sustainable development in particular.

The implementation of those reforms is a big challenge for the Country and will need a goodwill and a strong support, mainly in capacity building.

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