

Leasing Scarcity. Land Policies and Social Reality in Rwanda

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Present-day Rwanda is characterized by an authoritarian government and a population comprised primarily of subsistence farmers facing increasing land scarcity. One of Rwanda's new, far-reaching policies is a land law which determines that all land must be registered, that formal land titles must be issued, and land consolidation must be promoted. Once registered the right to landlordship is guaranteed by the state in terms of a 99 year lease for farmland. The government argues that the new land law will strengthen land tenure security, increase production, and enable people to mortgage their land. Therefore, and for the first time in its history, Rwanda is in the process of registering all plots.

The question however is if these goals will be met? Recent fieldwork carried out in a village in south-east Rwanda suggests that land conflicts are currently increasing, leading to severe problems within families, and between neighbours. Due to the fact that many people are not well informed about the land policy and its objectives, they often fear that the government is after their land. The paper argues that social reality is incongruent with the objectives of Rwanda's current land policy.