

A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF EXPECTED AND UNFORESEEN RESULTS OF HAITI'S LAND TENURE SECURITY PROJECT IN RURAL AREAS

Abstract

Keywords: Haiti, land tenure security, tenure clarification, land administration, impact evaluation

In Haiti, in addition to the insecurity experienced by informal occupants, users or tenants of State and private lands, “tenure insecurity” relates to the generalized lack of clarity about land ownership, namely to the lack of knowledge, based on legal proof, and of publicity about parcel boundaries, the identity of owner(s), and ownership rights. Unclear ownership stems in large part from the weakness of institutions responsible for guaranteeing land ownership rights and from the elevated and inconstant cost of land surveys and notary services, which have led to the lack of documentation and registration of parcel boundaries and property rights, or to their inaccurate, incomplete, or irregular documentation or registration.

Limited tenure security has been considered as a major factor of environmental degradation and poverty and as a major obstacle to reversing the latter rural areas in Haiti. The rural population still accounts for half of the country's population, and their livelihoods strongly rely on farming and the exploitation of natural resources such as wood. Other factors, such as the shrinking of farming plots down to “minor” sizes as a result of sub-divisions among siblings at the time of inheritance through generations, have also hindered rural development. On average, farms comprise 1.8 plots and are 1.7 ha in size; the majority of plots has less than 1ha and are sold in only as a last resort by farmers. Increased tenure security is also seen as a potential way to unlock the land market for more productive and sustainable uses.

In this context, the Government Haiti, more specifically Inter-Ministerial Committee on Land Use Planning (CIAT), started implementing in 2012, with a grant from the Inter-American Development Bank, a Land Tenure Security Project in Rural Areas (PSFMR). The PSFMR was originally designed to test whether a gradual approach – the **clarification of land tenure** alone, including the delimitation of parcel boundaries, the identification of owners and rights, and their cataloging in a land tenure database – *without* full legalization and registration would yield positive results and impacts. The project's presumption is that parcel demarcation and land ownership clarification, along with the strengthening of land administration institutions will “increase land tenure security of rural households in pilot targeted areas and improve the quality of land management services” and ultimately “contribute to agricultural productivity and promote medium and long term investments in agriculture and sustainable land and natural resources management”. Parcel demarcation and tenure clarification are to cover the area of five selected *communes (municipalities)*, of which two are located in the southern and three in the northern regions of the country. Communes were selected to represent different ecological and socio-economic contexts and to coincide with the area targeted by a separate project also financed by the IADB aimed at the sustainable management of selected watersheds. They comprise a large proportion of farms but also more densely populated centers.

To test the project's hypothesis and inform and adjust the strategy adopted by the Haitian government, the PSFMR is conducting an independent Economic Impact Evaluation, with NORC as the main contractor, in partnership with Land Alliance and the local data collection firm DAGMAR as sub-contractors. Considering that parcel demarcation and tenure clarification were far advanced in the commune of Camp Perrin, in the South, and that the preparation of

activities had not started in the other communes, the Impact Evaluation comprises two separate studies, each using a different methodology, and one synthesis of both studies.

The first study is currently evaluating the project's impact in Camp Perrin by comparing average results in a sample of households in this commune to average results in a sample of households with similar characteristics in the neighboring communes of Torbeck and Maniche, using propensity score matching to narrow the comparison group's sample. The second study uses a matched differences in differences approach: it will compare changes, over time, in a sample of households from two communes covered by the project, to changes in a sample of households with similar characteristics located in neighboring communes. In addition, it was considered that a qualitative analysis of the results, and in general a more qualitative reevaluation of survey responses was necessary in both studies. This to be able to validate the results through a different source, deepen the interpretation and establish a stronger causality, elucidate questions emerging from the quantitative results, identify unforeseen factors, and obtain concrete examples to illustrate the impacts of PSFMR or absence thereof.

Originally, the same hypothesis were used for the two studies, namely that the land tenure clarification should lead overall to a decrease in land-related conflicts, increase in tenure security perception by farmers, more sustainable land management, and ultimately to an increase in agricultural investments and productivity and farmer's economic well-being, as well as to an increase in land transactions. It was presumed that little or no increases in productivity and in investments would be observed in the South study since it is being carried out less than one year after the conclusion of activities in some sections of Camp Perrin.

Unexpectedly, Hurricane Matthew hit and severely affected the South of Haiti in 2016, forcing a revision of the South Evaluation's hypothesis and questionnaire to control for the impact of the hurricane and account for its influence on farmer's decisions. The revised South evaluation now focuses mostly on analyzing the difference in land conflicts and perceived tenure insecurity between a sample of Camp Perrin households and a sample of households in the comparison communes, although it will also analyze differences in farmer's land use decisions and investments that may be explained by the clarification of tenure before the hurricane.

No strong hypothesis is upheld for this study in the South, as there are not many precedents to evaluating the impact of securing tenure after a natural disaster. Rather, the study should contribute to generate evidence for a new question: do parcel demarcation and land ownership clarification reduce land conflicts, enhance security perception and contribute to sustainable land management and productive investments in a post-natural disaster context? The answer to this question should also allow to assess the extent to which land tenure clarification may have a positive impact in contexts, like Haiti, where extreme weather is a constant possibility, and not an exceptional factor for farmers.

The final, combined evidence of both studies, will be ready for dissemination in 2019. In the meantime, the findings of the qualitative study in the South may already shed a very interesting and sophisticated light on the impacts of the PSFMR and of similar projects at the household level. This paper and presentation will therefore seek to disseminate these first findings of the PSFMR's Economic Evaluation. It will summarize the detailed methodology used in the focus groups and interviews conducted with selected individuals – especially outliers - surveyed during the data collection, stress the questions raised by unexpected results of the quantitative analysis and explain, through farmer's answers and stories, what may have limited the impacts of the project or on the contrary contributed to generate positive results.