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The Dynamics of Land Tenure in the Poni and Nounbiel Provinces, Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Burkina Faso is a typical example of overlapping modern and traditional land tenure systems. Especially in rural areas, the customary systems persist, whereas the modern legislation is not yet implemented. Furthermore, the South-West of the country is strongly concerned about land conflicts due to the immigration of Fulani pastoralists. In a six months study, six villages were investigated in the Poni and Nounbiel provinces by semi-structured interviews with farmers, pastoralists and officials of regional institutions. During two field phases, basic data were collected in 374 households, of which a stratified sample was drawn for collecting information about land tenure, interethnic relations and conflict management. Several changes in the traditional land tenure system could be observed: The earth priest previously solely responsible in matters of land access and conflict management is nowadays assisted by an administrative delegate. Their responsibilities are complementary: The earth priest remains the spiritual village head and is responsible for land tenure and land allocation, whereas the administrative representative, whose role can be compared to that of a mayor, is responsible for conflict management. Results show two new developments in land access: Firstly, the hierarchical village structure is changing towards a more individualized system: Land remains common property, but is allocated to concession chiefs and not to clan chiefs any more, and the number of households per concession decreases. Secondly, the importance of land loans which play a secondary role in the customary system increases in consequence of the foreigners' immigration. Almost 30% of the investigated Fulani have taken their land on lease. Exceptional conditions were found in the village Kour where the Fulani population is above average with 34%. Only here the Fulani consider themselves as owners of the land they cultivate, whereas in the other villages, they accept the autochthonous settlers as owners and sometimes even complained about legal uncertainty. Despite a higher conflict frequency due to the higher density of cattle, the interethnic relations in Kour are reported as good. This shows that security of land access is an important precondition for a fruitful coexistence of farmers and herders.

Keywords: Burkina Faso, land conflicts, land tenure, property rights, West Africa