

***CLEAR's Book launch – Land policies in Sub-Saharan Africa  
Nairobi Safari Club, Nairobi 21 March 2006  
Statement of Ambassador Bo Goransson***

*Control over land is of central importance in any culture and from it derives control of most other natural resources that support livelihoods. But it is also about democracy and fundamental human rights, about food security, about environmental concerns and responsibilities, and about ability and incentives to invest. For individuals as well as communities, control of land is also about status, security, tradition and identity. To any African, these aspects are self-evident. On this continent, a majority of the population still depends directly or indirectly on land and other natural resources for its livelihood.*

*Needless to say, security of tenure is fundamental, and even more so now that most African countries go for market orientation also for smallholder agriculture. As land becomes more of a modern production asset, the rights to land risk becoming even more a source of conflict, of inequality and a subject of corruption than is the case today unless basic land rights are secured. It is also worth remembering that despite Africa generally being known as a continent of abundant land resources, in many areas the land frontier is now more or less reached at least with prevailing production systems. The wider penetration of market forces into ordinary rural African life and the beginning scarcity of land both serve as pointers to the fact that African countries need to do much more to ensure a reasonably equitable and fair land distribution and security of tenure, be it through ownership or other types of users' rights. This is fundamental for poverty reduction.*

*It is a great pleasure for me to be asked to launch this book, covering some of the contemporary most salient issues of (mainly rural) land policies in 14 Sub-Saharan countries. The countries were chosen as a combination of Sida programme countries in the region, adding up with some other countries of specific interest to Clear. Altogether, the country profiles in the book relate to: Burundi, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The profiles are meant to serve as a simple overview, a "quick start" for those who are not yet familiar with land policies and need some initial help to get a general picture. From there, it is possible to continue, there is neither lack of resource persons/ institutions or literature for those who want to specialise.*

*Support for the work has been granted by Sida's Resource Centre for Rural Development (RRD), a small and relatively new unit at the Embassy of Sweden here in Nairobi. RRD focusses on pro-poor rural growth and collaborates with Swedish embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as many different actors on the regional level in order to strengthen Sida as a partner and to identify regional initiatives worthwhile supporting.*

*It is increasingly being recognized that land reforms in Africa need to be linked to wider policy agendas of Poverty Reduction and Economic Recovery Strategies, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the AU-NEPAD initiatives. As can be seen in NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme – the CAADP – issues such as sustainable natural resources management are given top priority alongside with a commercialisation of smallholder agriculture, food security issues and improved productivity of land. It is thus very natural to start giving land policies more importance in strategy and policy work both on national and regional levels.*

*The CAADP itself does not explicitly deal with land reform, these issues seem to remain with the AU whose political leverage is important to bring them to the top of the agenda where they belong. Aiming for a 6 % annual agricultural growth, identified by African heads of states as the main vehicle of attaining the MDGs, is hard to imagine without unleashing the potential which could come out of stronger security of land tenure, a very fundamental reform needed in any society. You simply cannot reach 6 % growth without reaching the majority of people.*

*It is often said that national land policies all have their unique features and therefore are not suitable for regional cooperation. This is increasingly contested by policy researchers, who see much scope for bringing up sensitive land policy issues for analysis and comparisons in a regional context. Recent initiatives by the AU also point in this direction and this should be encouraged, there is a need for pressure and peer review among African countries in this area. We can see this coming now.*

*The original intention was to produce a fact book to support people in the development business, people who realise the fundamental importance of land rights but who lack comfortable access to the basic knowledge to get more acquainted with the issues. It is not just that land rights are sensitive issues, sometimes so sensitive that development partners and researchers do not feel very welcome trying to look into them. Land issues are also subject to some kind of strange mythology, where the specialists have a space of their own and where the basic notion is that these issues are so complicated that amateurs shy away. This is not tenable, land policies are issues related to practically everyone and need to be understood by many in order to enable a public debate on how to improve policies. We hope this publication can contribute to reducing the barrier for all non-experts to approach these issues. Therefore, the publication will also be made available on the Internet.*

*While work was underway, coordinated by Clear, it proved that a compilation of facts like this one seems to fill other gaps which we did not realise from the start. There is abundant literature in the field of land policy, but little to cover the basic needs of different groups of stakeholders, many more than development workers. We have encountered so much enthusiasm and interest also from other categories such as universities, government officials, land alliances and NGOs. This is all very welcome and we trust the publication will be useful.*

*As demonstrated in the book, nearly all countries in the region have initiated and some have completed land policy formulation processes during the last decade. The character of these processes varies widely, reflecting different political and cultural settings. The fact that countries are at different stages – not all very advanced - of land reform on national level may be of concern in itself, given the many listed burning policy issues on the respective agendas. It is even more so given the increasing regional integration efforts where matters such as management of shared natural resources and environmental damage need attention. All in all, the picture provided in the book on the status of land policies and reforms is not very encouraging, having in mind the very central importance of land for stability, livelihood security, conflict prevention, growth and sustainable use of natural resources. This is not the moment to be prescriptive, and neither is this the purpose of the book, but getting an overview like this does provide a reminder of the fragility of many African economies. I am confident that once more African countries can get their acts together, formulate appropriate land policies and laws – and show real political will to implement them – donors will be more than happy to support this as a cornerstone in the national economies.*

*One important principle in RRD's work is to investigate the African resource base in important policy areas, one of them being natural resources tenure. A very important lesson from this collaboration with Clear is that there is abundant knowledge and engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa on land and other resource tenure rights- within national and regional land alliances, universities and different national and international organisations. These impressive capacities and networks are great assets to the continent and surely there is indigenous capacity to handle these complex issues with the insight needed. As in many other important political areas, it may prove to be the political courage and will that constitute the limiting factors for land reform.*

*The Paris Agenda stipulates that donors should align with their partner country agendas, elaborate common support strategies, they should coordinate and gradually, as financial management mechanisms and political trust improve, provide support to governments' budgets. As has been the case with sector support, dialogue on this general budget support initially tends to concentrate on technical matters related to public financial management. However difficult it may be, there should also be a critical dialogue on the direction and efficiency of the national strategies and this is where land reform should play an important role, both for rural and urban areas.*

*It is quite probable that, in the near future, such dialogue could be coordinated within the sectoral peer reviews planned as part of the CAADP launched by NEPAD. A number of countries in the region, one of them is Kenya, have informed the NEPAD Secretariat about their interest to launch such peer reviews. This is where a critical debate on land reform would be very timely. Given the crucial role of land tenure security for poverty reduction, it would be high time in a country like Kenya to raise the issue of de-linking powers over land distribution from political actors and to transfer them to neutral agencies governed by a transparent regulatory framework which has been scrutinised by the public.*

*From Sida's side, we are happy that this publication has now materialised (I am told it has been something like a roller-coaster to get it through editing and printing, but isn't that always the case with publications?). It represents a very robust and enduring work coordinated by Dr Akinyi Nzioki of CLEAR with contributions from a large number of resource persons in her network. We are most grateful for all this effort and find that the book, through its clear structure, will serve its purpose on our side. We will share it with colleagues within the organisation and encourage them to approach land policy issues, for example in strategy processes. The publication also is helpful in providing further contacts with people and institutions who can assist in different countries.*

*For CLEAR, we know that this has represented a major effort, hopefully a rewarding one in terms of contacts and knowledge. We hope it will be useful for you and we encourage you to disseminate it widely, to elaborate on the facts, to make it a living document. Apart from having this book now available, the collaboration around it during the last 18 months has also produced a close and trustful relationship between Sida and CLEAR – we are most grateful for it and expect our working relationship to continue.*

***With these words, many best wishes for a successful dissemination and hope for a boost of land policy discussions – I hereby launch the publication on Land Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thank you!***