

**IMPACT OF INSECURE RIGHTS ON
BURKINA FASO'S FARMERS**

Burkina Faso



➔ Burkina Faso's economy is heavily agrarian, with 85 percent of the population engaged in agriculture, livestock rearing, or forestry. *Photo: Guewenn (FLICKR)*


By Benjamin Linkow

INTRODUCTION

Insecure land tenure has been identified as an important constraint on agricultural development across a wide variety of contexts. Where farmers face risks that their claims to land may be challenged or overturned, their incentives to make productive investments in land are weakened. In the context of Burkina Faso, tenure insecurity is a significant and increasing concern for farmers. This brief describes how land tenure insecurity can impact agricultural producers, as well as the particular dimensions of land tenure insecurity in Burkina Faso.



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In a country that experiences frequent food shortages, the potential loss of farmland is a serious concern for small-scale farmers.

➔ Farmers grow corn, cabbage, lettuce, potatoes, and beans in this garden near Burkina Faso's Lake Bam. *Photo: CIFOR/Olivier Girard*

IMPLICATIONS OF INSECURE PROPERTY RIGHTS

In many developing country contexts, property rights over agricultural land are not fully defined or enforced. Rural producers often lack formal, documented rights to land in the form of titles or deeds. Even where formal rights exist, state institutions may lack the capacity to maintain accurate records of rights, adjudicate disputes, or handle transactions. In many contexts, including Burkina Faso, traditional systems play an important role in allocating and protecting rights to land. However, changing circumstances such as increasing population pressures and migration can put traditional systems under strain. Ultimately, when the prevalent property rights system fails to adequately protect the claims of producers from challenges by others, there are implications for agricultural productivity.

Research on this topic points to four main channels along which insecure property rights can affect agricultural outcomes. First, the risk of land conflict or expropriation weakens investment incentives by reducing the expected


payoff for certain types of investment. These include investments that are immobile, such as wells or buildings. In the event that the farmer's rights to the underlying land are lost, the value of these investments will be lost as well. For example, Deininger and Jin (2006) find evidence that stronger land rights affect incentives to build terraces in Ethiopia. Similarly, incentives are weakened for investments that pay off over time, for example planting tree crops or engaging in soil conservation measures. These investments are less attractive if the cultivator cannot be certain that his or her land rights will be maintained during the time horizon over which the returns to the investment accrue. Examples include weakened incentives to plant tree crops as observed by Besley (1995) in Ghana, and higher value tobacco planting in Malawi (Place and Otsuka 2001).

Second, insecure property rights may reduce access to credit (Besley 1995). Where property rights are not fully protected and transferable, land cannot be used as collateral to obtain loans. As these loans may be used to make productivity-enhancing investments, reduced access to credit means reduced agricultural productivity. While this issue has been argued to be particularly

important in other contexts (e.g. de Soto 2000), the empirical evidence suggests that it is less important in Africa, where credit markets may be constrained for other reasons (e.g., Besley, Burchardi, and Ghatak 2012).

Third, insecure property rights may have adverse impacts by inducing cultivators to allocate resources to defending property rights that could otherwise be put to productive use. Besley (1995), Sjaastad and Bromley (1997) and others have noted that certain types of visible investments such as tree planting are frequently made to strengthen recognition of property rights under the informal system. Where property rights are secure, investment strategies can be instead undertaken to maximize returns. Similarly, Field (2007) finds that insecure property rights can result in re-allocation of labor to watch over property and prevent competing claims.

Finally, weak property rights limit the transferability of land. Where land cannot be bought and sold, farm sizes will tend to be sub-optimal as households are unable to adjust their land endowments to match their endowments of other factors and access to capital (Deininger and Jin 2008). In



A 2010 survey of households in 377 villages asked farmers to identify major sources of land conflict and threats to land security, and associated economic impacts.

→ The Village of Zorro, Burkina Faso. Photo: CIFOR/Olivier Girard

addition, the value of investments in land cannot be recouped by selling the land, which Brasselle et. al. (2002) term “the realizability effect.”

LAND RIGHTS AND LAND CONFLICT IN BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso’s economy is heavily agrarian, with 85 percent of the population engaged in agriculture, livestock rearing, or forestry (World Bank 2009). While the law permits private ownership, in practice agricultural land is largely governed by customary tenure systems. Rights to land are vested in traditional authorities called *chefs de terre*. Land is typically acquired either through inheritance or allocated by the *chef de terre*. In addition, there is an active system of both short- and long-term loans of land between households (Mathieu et. al. 2003). Sales and rental markets are rare in rural areas.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that conflicts related to land are a serious problem of increasing severity (USAID 2010). Mathieu et. al. (2003) describe a scenario of population pressures leading to increasing land scarcity in

the face of competing interests, as younger heads of household call into question the authority of traditional systems dominated by elders, while the children of migrants seek to assert permanent rights. Ouedraogo (2006) highlights a rapid influx of investment in farmland by agribusinesses, civil servants, and others as a source of concern. Gray (2002) points to increasing tensions between groups with historical claims to an area and migrants, which often take the form of conflicts between pastoralists and sedentary farmers.

SURVEY REVEALS FARMERS’ CONCERNS

A survey showing evidence of perceived tenure insecurity was carried out in 2010 as part of a Millennium Challenge Corporation impact evaluation. The survey was administered to 10,361 adults comprising 3,552 households in 377 villages. The study area captures a broad cross-section of the variety of agro-ecological and demographic conditions in the country. The survey provides evidence on the following questions: to what extent do rural households in Burkina Faso perceive

insecure land tenure as a concern? What are the specific aspects of land tenure insecurity that are of concern? What do the data say about which of these aspects have important economic implications? And, who is most vulnerable to these economically important dimensions of land tenure insecurity?

The survey includes two questions to assess the overall extent of land tenure insecurity. Respondents were asked whether they would characterize land conflicts as “not a concern,” “somewhat of a concern,” or “a major concern” for their households. In addition, respondents were asked whether they were concerned about one day losing their land, with the response options of “not at all,” “somewhat,” and “yes.” These responses are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Both for their own households and their villages in general, more than half of all respondents indicated that land conflicts were at least somewhat of a concern. 20.2 percent of respondents identified land conflicts as a serious problem for their households, while 23.2 percent were similarly concerned about conflicts in their villages. Meanwhile, just over one-third of all respondents indicated some concern about land expropriation.

These results suggest that while not a universal phenomenon, land tenure insecurity is a major concern for many agricultural producers in Burkina Faso.

FARMERS IDENTIFY MAIN THREATS

The survey goes on to investigate the specific issues related to conflict and expropriation that are of concern. Based on interviews and fieldwork conducted prior to the survey, six types of conflict and three potential sources of expropriation were identified and included in the questionnaire. The sources of conflict were as follows:

1. *Conflicts with migrants over rights to agricultural land.* The arrival of migrants seeking agricultural land was frequently cited as a significant concern. Migration was said to have become increasingly common, with land availability an important driver of migration decisions. In the absence of land markets, migrants must try to obtain land through informal arrangements, which often lead to conflict.
2. *Conflicts with non-residents seeking land for non-agricultural purposes.* A second source of concern that respondents identified was the so-

called “new actors” - wealthy outsiders primarily from urban areas seeking to obtain land for speculative or commercial purposes. For the purposes of the survey, these were categorized as non-residents seeking land for non-agricultural purposes.

3. *Conflicts with former residents of the village returning to claim land.* Land transfers in the study area take place at the discretion of traditional authorities and are rarely accompanied by formal documentation. As a result, a common source of conflict is the return of a former resident of the village seeking to re-establish prior claims to land that is being cultivated by others. In addition, in the absence of land markets, long term loans of land are common and may also result in disputes particularly when land that has been loaned out is inherited.

4. *Inheritance conflicts.* Conflicts between family members over inheritance rights are another source of concern. These may occur between siblings, or between widows and their children or the offspring of other wives in the case of polygamous households.

5. *Conflict related to damage caused by livestock.* Livestock rearing is a common income-generating activity in the study area, both on the part of sedentary

farmers and transhumance pastoralists who pass through. As a result, damage to crops and other property caused by livestock is a common source of disputes.

6. *Conflict related to access to water or pasture for livestock.* An additional source of livestock-related conflict relates to transhumance pastoralism. Migratory cattle movements take place along corridors of land that

+ STATISTIC

Over half of survey respondents reported concerns over land conflicts, and more than one-third were concerned that they could one day lose their land.



Access to water for agriculture or livestock can lead to conflict. This lake is used by car and motorcycle washers, pastoralists and gardeners. *Photo: CIFOR/Olivier Girard*



have been set aside and designated for this purpose. Due to growing land scarcity, agriculturalists are reported to be increasingly infringing on these corridors and cultivating them, restricting access to pastureland or water sources.

SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND LAND LOSS

Respondents were asked to characterize their concern over each type of conflict as “not a concern,” “somewhat of a concern,” or “a major concern” for their households. Conflicts related to damage caused by livestock are overwhelming cited as the most pressing problem. These conflicts were more than twice as likely to be identified as a problem than any other type of conflict, with a large majority of respondents indicating some level of concern. Access to water for livestock was the second most commonly cited concern. The remaining types of conflicts were cited with similar frequency to one another, with approximately three-quarters reporting no concern about each type of conflict.

In addition to conflict, three potential sources of land expropriation were identified. First, land could be taken by the state, either for public use such as an irrigation or other land development project, or as part of a forced redistribution of land. Secondly, a rural resident could have their land taken by another more powerful resident of their village. Thirdly, landholders could lose their land as a consequence of a challenge by a private individual from outside the village. The responses to these questions are summarized in Figure 3. The biggest concern is expropriation by the government, as nearly two-thirds of respondents express concern that the state might one day take their land. Meanwhile, respondents tended to be more concerned about losing their land to other residents of the village than they were to outsiders.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Insecure tenure can impact agricultural productivity along a number of lines. This section presents the results of a regression analysis of the relationship



Population pressures and competing interests are leading to increasing land scarcity. Nearly two-thirds of surveyed farmers were concerned that the State might expropriate their land.
Photo: Dielmar Temps

between the perceived risk of various types of perceived conflict risk and agricultural productivity. The analysis was carried out by estimating a separate regression model for each type of conflict and expropriation risk, with the natural logarithm of the value of agricultural output per hectare as the dependent variable. In each case, a range of control variables was included in the regressions to account for differences in agricultural productivity other than tenure insecurity.

Estimates of the reduction in agricultural productivity due to each type of conflict and expropriation risk are presented in Table 1. The numbers in the table can be interpreted as a comparison in the percentage decrease in productivity between 1) a household perceiving the indicated type of conflict as “somewhat of a concern” or “a serious concern,” and 2) an otherwise identical household perceiving that type of conflict as “not a concern.” Of serious concern are large decreases in productivity (over 40 percent)

associated with perceiving conflicts related to the arrival of new migrants and former residents of the village returning to claim land. Also of note are conflicts related to access to water for livestock, which also appear to have a substantial impact on productivity. The remaining perceptions of conflict risk show only small impacts on productivity, which are not statistically significantly different from zero.

Despite the fact that conflicts related to damage caused by livestock were most often cited as a concern, this type of conflict was not associated with a substantial decrease in productivity. Conversely, conflicts over the arrival of migrants and former residents returning to the village were among the least-frequently cited sources of concern. However, those households that were concerned about these issues experienced large decreases in productivity. The implication is that where land conflict is concerned, the types of issues that are most often raised as problems may not in fact

+ FACT

Conflicts related to migration and former residents returning to claim land had a large impact on farmers’ livelihoods, and was associated with a 40 percent reduction in agricultural productivity.

be those that have the most severe consequences on those affected.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

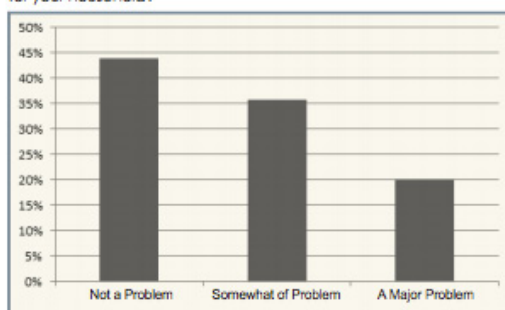
The foregoing discussion suggests the following conclusions:

1. Land tenure insecurity is a serious problem in Burkina Faso. Over half of all surveyed households report that land conflicts are a concern for their household, while over one-third express concern that they could one day lose their land.

2. Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists are the most commonly cited source of concern. Although a range of different types of conflict are of concern to farmers in Burkina Faso, the two most common concerns were damages caused by livestock, and conflicts related to access to water sources for herders.

3. Vulnerability to conflicts related to migration and former residents returning to claim land has large impacts on agricultural productivity. The estimated impact on households expressing a high degree of concern over these types of conflicts was a reduction in agricultural productivity of over 40%. Thus, for households that are vulnerable to these types of conflict, tenure insecurity is a severe constraint on investment and livelihoods.

Figure 1. In your opinion, how serious of a concern are land conflicts for your household?



¹ The sample is not nationally representative, however.

Figure 2. Are you worried that you could lose your land one day?

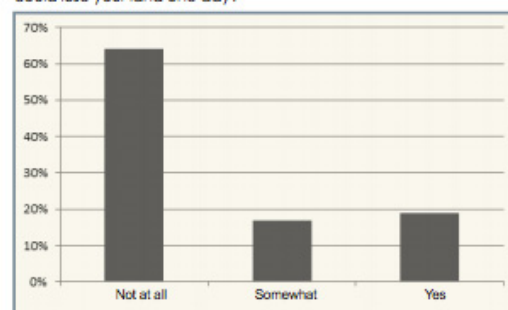
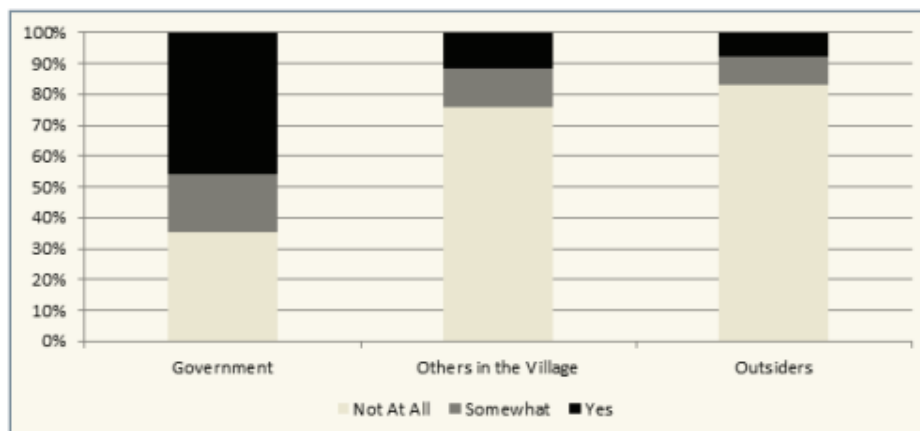


Figure 3. Types of expropriation



² Surprisingly, more respondents were concerned that the state might one day take their land than expressed concern about losing their land at all (see Figure 2). One possible explanation for this is that prompting for concerns about the state in particular may have led respondents to consider their overall concern about expropriation differently.

Table 1. Effect of conflict risk on agricultural productivity

Type of conflict	Somewhat of concern	Serious concern
Arrival of new migrants	-0.2%	-45.5%
Outsiders seeking land for non-agricultural purposes	-15.5%	-3.6%
Former residents returning	-2.5%	-42.2%
Inheritance	1.3%	-4.4%
Livestock damage	-11.7%	-7.7%
Access to water for livestock	-3.2%	-22.9%

Note: Bold indicates statistically significant at .10 or greater



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