



Roundtable to discuss the findings of the LAND-at-scale study in Egypt

Tuesday 10th May 2022, 9.30-12.30 (Cairo Marriott Hotel, Aida Hall room, Zamalek)

Objectives of the Roundtable:

- Present the findings from a LAND-at-scale preparatory study
- Open up discussion and get feedback
- Present next steps for LAND-at-scale in Egypt
- Stimulate multi-stakeholder exchange
- Build a network of Egyptian experts who can continue to act as resource persons
- Explore options for continued land governance multi-stakeholder exchange in Egypt

Welcome and introduction

On Tuesday 10th May 2022, a group of expert delegates (see Annex I) from government institutions, United Nations, civil society, private sector and academia joined a roundtable discussion organized by the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo and the Netherlands Enterprise and Development Agency (RVO) on opportunities for land governance support in Upper Egypt. The roundtable introduced participants to an exploratory study which was commissioned by RVO. The objective of the study was to identify entry points for LAND-at-scale support to land governance in Egypt, with a focus on options for add-on activities related to the ongoing WFP/ MALR programme 'Strengthening Climate Resilience and Food Security in Upper Egypt'.

Omar Abdellatif of the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo welcomed all participants and shared the objectives of the roundtable. Armand Evers of the Netherlands Embassy emphasized the many different activities focusing on rural development, sustainability and agricultural production in Upper Egypt and the potential for stakeholders to work closely together on these important topics. Gemma Betsema of the Netherlands Enterprise and Development Agency continued by welcoming all participants and introduced the LAND-at-scale programme of the Dutch Government. The LAND-at-scale programme is a global land governance support programme with a portfolio of 12 countries. The programme is demand-driven and receives requests for support from Dutch Embassies. She furthermore highlighted the background of a possible LAND-at-scale intervention in Egypt: to address land fragmentation challenges by building on the successes of the ongoing WFP/ MALR programme 'Strengthening Climate Resilience and Food Security in Upper Egypt' with a focus on their land use consolidation experiences. Today's roundtable aims to bring together key experts on the topic, present and discuss findings from the exploratory research carried out by a consultant, and explore the added value of possible LAND-at-scale support in Egypt. Betsema also stressed that LAND-at-scale is explicitly looking for small and strategic activities that can have larger effects by linking up with project and programmes of other development partners.

Presentation of main findings from the exploratory study

The consultant responsible for the exploratory study, David Sims, presented his main findings based on 3 months of research. He combined key stakeholder consultations in Cairo with field visits in the WFP/ MALR project areas in Luxor. He kicks off his presentation by emphasizing that when we speak of land use consolidation in this context, we do not include land ownership consolidation. Sims furthermore set the scene by highlighting the three main strategies of the Government of Egypt towards the Old Lands: poverty alleviation, water conservation and food security. His study has found that land registration in Egypt – and particularly in the Old Lands – is complex,

expensive and lengthy and the formal structure has mostly fallen out of use. As a result, the current practices in use on the Old Lands are side-stepping the formal procedures. Simple contracts, often written, witnessed by two individuals, is the most common way to transfer properties. These contracts can be endorsed and confirmed with signatures which can in turn be registered. New laws are in the making, to reduce fees and make registration faster, but this has not filtered through to daily use of land in Upper Egypt. From the perspective of agricultural productivity, smallholder income and food security, as well as from a sustainability perspective, the extreme fragmentation of lands is the biggest obstacle faced by smallholder farmers. According to his findings, this should be the entry point for LAND-at-scale.

As part of the exploratory study, Sims also made an initial stakeholder analysis and his presentation continues by highlighting some of the key stakeholders at village and national level. He particularly mentions the crucial role of Community Development Associations in the WFP/ MALR programme. For issues of land governance, local lawyers also play an important role in facilitating land transfers. At the national level, Sims highlights the different Ministries closely involved in any activities focusing on rural development in Upper Egypt: the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources, and the Ministry of Local Government. Donor agencies represent a portfolio with a total budget of 545 million dollar and are characterized in the study report as a 'crowded field'.

The WFP/ MALR programme 'Strengthening Climate Resilience and Food Security in Upper Egypt' was included in the study and Sims highlights some key aspects of his findings. The programme has a distinct approach to what they call land use consolidation, but what might from a technical perspective be better phrased as 'agricultural parcel consolidation' or 'consolidated cultivation'. The approach is characterized by much interaction with and consultation of farmers, through Community Development Associations and Agricultural Cooperatives. Community mobilization, where people are encouraged to come together in a voluntary manner, is at the core of the initial steps. Incentives brought in by the project include soil levelling, creation of ways and roads, and support in cultivation of crops. Incentives are gradually phased out with 100% subsidy in the first season, 75% the second season, 50% the third season etc. Though some observers are worried that the motivation to adopt land use consolidation and associated improvements will diminish or disappear once the subsidy is exhausted, anecdotal information from the study points to considerable buy-in by farmers and general popularity of the idea, with continued interest after the subsidies are exhausted and also of neighbouring farmers adopting land use consolidation even without project support. Based on the findings, Sims has suggested a list of activities for consideration of LAND-at-scale to take up. The list has been circulated amongst workshop participants and is added to these minutes as Annex 2.

Discussion and feedback

After the consultant finishes his overview of main findings, Omar Abdellatif of the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo opens the floor for questions or additions. The FAO representative kicks off the discussion by questioning the labelling of WFP/ MALR activities in Upper Egypt as 'land use consolidation'. He stressed that for it to be called land consolidation, a much more integrated approach should be taken, Agricultural Cooperatives should be closely involved and linkages with markets should be established. The representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR) emphasizes that the programme has a tailor-made approach, building on years of experience and developed in the specific context of Upper Egypt. He continues by pointing out that our mutual interest is in addressing challenges linked with extreme land fragmentation, and this issue should be much more prominent on our agenda. The WFP representative adds that activities should not be seen as an end in itself, it is part of a bigger journey in which we put farmers in the centre. WFP is working with farmers, not just to introduce new techniques or provide direct support, but also to change the hearts and minds of people. We need to build understanding about challenges related to land fragmentation and open their eyes to see the possibilities of collective production. The approach should be seen as a model which can be scaled up by government.

The representative from the private sector underlines the challenges they face working with smallholder farmers on extremely fragmented farmlands. They highlight the importance of incentives which can be used to convince farmers to join efforts and pool their land resources. As an idea, a land consolidation fund is proposed which can enable private sector entities to work with smallholder farmers in more efficient and effective ways.

The UN Habitat representative comes in and shares their experiences with land readjustment processes in urban areas. They pose the question whether we are addressing land issues from a

social or economic point of view. From their experience, the exchanges were mostly from both angles: the only way to convince owners was to present the value for money. If farmers are not convinced, there is need to change the mindset.

The representative of CARE Egypt also works closely with smallholder farmers and they underline that if you are able to show farmers that they are more powerful when united, farmers will be interested in what you propose. CARE works in such a way that they link farmers to NGO's to increase their productivity. Land fragmentation has not been a theme they worked on so far. LAND-at-scale should focus on and depart from the perspective of farmer productivity.

Participants were raising the issue of sustainability of the WFP/ MALR intervention and the need to incentives to continue flowing. The consultant's study shows initial anecdotal evidence that land use consolidation is a sustainable approach, even after incentives are removed. However, scaling up the successes of the WFP/ MALR programme should be grounded in a better understanding of the sustainability of the intervention. Subsequent upscaling will rely very much on raising awareness about the benefits of land use consolidation, both at farmer level as well as national level. And this awareness raising will be very much grounded in success stories about the approach – collecting these success stories is therefore another important building block for the approach. The representative of MALR also emphasizes the potential of organizing farmers in business associations, and the importance of getting the private sector interested in setting up factories in rural Egypt.

Another important element brought into the discussion was the topic of climate change, which forces us to speed up our efforts to make agricultural production more sustainable and resilient to droughts. WFP/ MALR integrates climate activities into their approach, and any future LAND-at-scale activities should build on this as well.

Betsema closes the discussion by thanking all participants for sharing their reflections and recognizing that we need to be modest as LAND-at-scale: the group discussed some major topics today and we will not be able to solve them all. That is why RVO asked a consultant to look at the ongoing WFP/ MALR programme and identify where we can have an added value from LAND-at-scale perspective. Initial findings show that the approach of land use consolidation being applied is working well, we see that farmers are even replicating the approach without any subsidies because of the demonstration effect. And this is what the LAND-at-scale programme wants to build on. In terms of scaling we want to try and identify those elements that make the approach successful and share lessons with others to build on. As Sims mentioned in his presentation, IFAD and GIZ are soon starting a much bigger intervention in Upper Egypt. Let us all share our insights and lessons so that we can gradually achieve bigger impacts by addressing the land fragmentation issue.

Today's discussion highlighted that social aspects are crucial, the need to change people's hearts and minds; we need to consider the role of incentives and make sure we build interventions that are sustainable even after project incentives are removed; we also heard the importance of working within the existing institutional setting may it be CDA's or Agricultural Cooperatives, to make sure that what we do is institutionalized. And overall, what today's discussion showed us most clearly is the need for a multi-stakeholder, multi-sector approach to land fragmentation. Finally, it is also put forward by participants that we should learn from other country experiences when it comes to land use consolidation. In the follow-up discussions during lunch the aspect of paying due attention to gender were also prioritized by participants.

LAND-at-scale's next steps will be to share the consultancy report with all participants (Annex III to these minutes). Together with our partners on the ground, LAND-at-scale will work on creating a pilot project taking into account the recommendations made in the report. In case workshop participants have additional insights they are invited to share them with RVO and the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo: Gemma Betsema (gemma.betsema@rvo.nl) and Omar Abdellatif (omar.abdellatif@minbuza.nl).

Annex I: List of participants

Annex II: Recommendations from exploratory study

Annex III: Study report