

PROPERTY ISSUES

General

Insufficient land distribution for displaced families (2001-2002)

- UN/ government report states that although more displaced families received land in the 2001-2002 agricultural campaign than in the previous one, the size and in some cases the quality of the land parcels were insufficient
- Recommendations for the next agricultural campaign include improving coordination of agricultural inputs to vulnerable families

"A preliminary report by FAO, WFP/VAM and MINADER on the results of the 2001 - 2002 Agricultural Campaign from September 2001 and March 2002 indicated that although more displaced families received land than during the last agricultural campaign, the size of the parcels was insufficient (.15 - .5 ha) and the quality of the land was poor in some cases. In addition, the number of families receiving agricultural inputs from humanitarian organisations and provincial MINADER delegations increased, although late distributions negatively affected the preparation of fields in some areas. The results of the study also indicated that insufficient rain during November and early December led to reduced harvests of peanuts, corn and beans in Uige and Kuanza Norte Provinces. In the central and southern regions of the country, crops planted during the first agricultural period are expected to produce satisfactory results. The report made several recommendations for the next agricultural campaign, including improving coordination in the distribution of agricultural inputs to vulnerable families and creating an emergency seed bank. The report also highlighted the importance of receiving funds in a timely manner to avoid delays in distribution and the need to coordinate and prioritise mine verification and de-mining activities to increase access to agricultural land." (UN OCHA, 30 April 2002)

Valuable land remains in hands of powerful economic and military interest groups (December 2000)

- Large and relatively secure coastal strip of land has fallen prey to economic and military interests linked to the oil industry
- These powerful interest groups are reluctant to lease the land to displaced persons for fear of future ownership claims
- Powerful landowners known to influence the location of displaced persons camps in order to acquire cheap labour pools near land plots

As reported by Reuters in late December 2000:

"Though land tenure has been at the root of many squabbles for thousands of years, in Angola it has an unusual nature because of recent history and the tide of land-poor people fleeing war to urban centres.

[...]

Economic change swept Angola after Marxist-Leninism was officially abolished in 1989. In a series of so-called privatisations in the 1990s, powerful politicians obtained concessions for potentially lucrative property and land, although in theory these remain state property. In this chaotic liberalisation, ordinary people's rights to use land shrivelled and ownership has become unclear.

[...]

Many Angolans have fled violence in the countryside to government-held urban centres, often fed by the U.N. World Food Programme, Médecins sans Frontières, and others. Displaced people and residents grow what they can within the narrow security perimeters of these isolated towns and food finds its way into local markets by various routes.

The land is worth little in commercial terms, however, because of the insecurity.

In some places, such as the large and relatively secure coastal strip stretching from Lobito to Benguela and southwards for another 50 km to Dombe Grande, land has real commercial value and potential.

For this reason, it has fallen prey to powerful economic and even military interests linked to the oil-rich government. Many are reluctant even to lease the land to the displaced or other poor people, in case of future ownership claims.

People from Damba Maria, Dombe Grande and other areas sometimes work as labourers for big farmers in a system known by some here as 'chinyango.'

The standard of payment is one kilogram (two pounds) of fuba (maize meal) per day is not enough to feed a family but the alternative – unemployment – is worse.

And because of their weak links with local communities, displaced people are at the bottom of any pecking order.

'People with a lot of land are exploiting the weakness of deslocados so they can pay little. This is a generalised thing,' the U.N. official said. 'In Benguela, it is the big farmers. Inland, the farmers are smaller-scale, so the problem is not so bad.'

A diplomat in the capital Luanda also said powerful landowners in various parts of the country had influenced the location of some camps for deslocados, to provide pools of cheap labour for their farms. 'This is a real betrayal of the people,' she said.

The land issue is acquiring new urgency today. The economic changes and, to some extent, government military successes in the past year that have reduced risk levels in some parts of the country, have provoked a scramble for land by some senior officials." (Reuters 28 December 2000)