

CHAPTER 4

LAND TENURE AND SOIL CONSERVATION

4.1 Legal Tenure

A distinctive feature of agricultural land tenure in the Caribbean is the large number of small holdings which occupy a disproportionately small area or percentage of agricultural land. A high percentage of the land is not owner occupied. The data for Grenada, St. Vincent and St. Kitts presented in **Table 4.1** are typical.

Lack of secure tenure by the large majority of farmers restricts the effective functioning of both the land market and the incentive for long term investments in land and agriculture. In St. Lucia a major limitation is "**family land**" which is jointly claimed by members of an extended family, sometimes more than 50, who have undivided rights to cultivate or otherwise occupy a portion of the family's land. The actual cultivator of the land is therefore without incentive to invest in the land or to use it as collateral. Many of the very small farmers have short term rented land and would like to lease or own to be able to access credit and increase investment. Farmers with short term insecure tenure do not grow tree crops and cannot readily be persuaded to do so. In St. Kitts more than 90% of the land is Government owned and only recently has it been persuaded to offer longer leases (35 years) to induce a long term view of agriculture.

In Antigua, the production from small farms is declining. Medium and some large scale entrepreneurial farmers are developing a wide variety of enterprises for the local and export niche market using improved technologies. Enterprises include meat production, melon, pineapple, pawpaw (payaya), good quality vegetables (especially onions) under appropriate irrigation. The Agricultural Development Corporation, a Government organization with a production remit, is producing pineapples, food crops, vegetables and fruits. The future of agriculture in Antigua will be determined by these groups unless Government increases security of tenure to small farmers and assist with timely

TABLE 4.1: Farm size distribution and type of tenure in Grenada, St. Kitts and St. Vincent

Grenada

(a) Farm Size Distribution

<u>Size of farms</u> (ha)	<u>No. of farms</u>	<u>% of farms</u>	<u>% of land area</u>	<u>Area of agric. land</u> (ha)
< 2	7218	88	31	2411
2-20	902	11	36	2800
> 20	82	1	32	2489

49% of farms were < 0.5 ha

(b) Tenure

Owner	37	2878
Owner/Renter combination	22	1711
Renter	6	467
Manager	22	1711
Family owned	11	855
Share cropped	1	78
Landless	0.7	54

St. Kitts

(a) Farm Size Distribution

<u>Size of farms</u> (ha)	<u>No. of farms</u>	<u>% of farms</u>
0.04 - 1.2	3000	92
1.2 - 10	220	7
>10	32	1

Cont'd

TABLE 4.1 - Cont'd**(b) Tenure**

	<u>% of farms</u>
Owner	36.4
* Operated free	38.5
Renter/short lease	23.5
Share cropped	1.6

* as part of old estate arrangements

St. Vincent**(a) Farm Size Distribution**

<u>Size of farms</u> <u>(ha)</u>	<u>No. of farms</u>	<u>% of farms</u>	<u>% of land</u> <u>area</u>	<u>Area of</u> <u>agric. land</u> <u>(ha)</u>
< 1.0	4888	72	15	1783
1.0- 2.0	974	14	11	1288
2.0-10.0	852	12.5	22	2612
10.0-20.0	35	0.5	4	480
> 20	50	0.7	49	5860

(b) Tenure

Owner	4763	72	68	8124
Renter	1094	17	9	1084
Squatter	298	5	3	319
More than one form	465	7	20	2427

inputs e.g. fertilizers, water, storage, transport, marketing and technical assistance. The advantage of this trend towards larger scale production, however, is that soil conservation would be easier to implement.

The State is a major land holder (Crown Lands) in many Caribbean countries. In the extreme case of St. Kitts, the State owns as much as 90% of the land. This facilitates the protection of land as forest reserves or protected areas for water production, national parks and other activities in the public interest. In all States, the Crown has the legal right to acquire lands for public purposes. The legal right is generally prescribed in The Land Acquisition Act. Unoccupied lands may also be vested in the Crown e.g. under the Crown Lands Ordinance of St. Lucia or Crown Lands (Vesting and Disposal) Act of Barbados. However, in some islands the records of ownership and title to land are not always current and easily available. In this situation the ownership of some land is not always known or is in dispute and the exact amount of land owned by the State is not always known.

Most States have made efforts to protect small agricultural holdings by legal instruments enshrined in the Agricultural Small Holdings Act (St. Kitts/Nevis), Agricultural Small Tenancies Act (St. Lucia, St. Vincent), Security of Tenure of Small Holdings Act (Barbados), Agricultural Small Tenancies Ordinance (Grenada, Dominica).

In several islands e.g. Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, Governments have been purchasing estates for distribution to farmers or distributing Crown Land in land settlement or rural development schemes. Although farmers are required by legislation to practise soil conservation, this is not enforced and there is often insufficient or inadequate agricultural extension and technical support to ensure or enforce good soil management.

It seems therefore that insecure tenure is a major deterrent to farmers practising soil conservation on small holdings. Most of the farmers on these lands are not interested in soil conservation *per se* and in protecting the land which they do not own. Small farmers do not adopt soil conservation practices which they perceive to be using their limited available space and to be competing for scarce resources (e.g. labour) without bringing a cash return.

Therefore, a small farmer on steep land which he does not own is a threat to soil erosions, on his plot and downslope.

4.2 Squatting

Squatting is a growing problem in the Caribbean. It is being accelerated by the declining economies and rising unemployment. Squatting takes place largely on State-owned lands, large estates or lands with absentee owners. Squatters commonly occupy land at high elevation and on steep slopes and use the land for housing and agriculture. Because of the lack of permanence in the tenancy, there is no incentive to practise soil management which would conserve the soil against erosion. There is slash and burn activity and crops are planted in relation to market demand and not land capability. Forest fires and deforestation frequently occur from slash and burn agriculture and other activities of squatters.

The number of squatters and the area of land they occupy have not been determined but it is evident that there is substantial squatting in many of the islands. A recent media report of a speech by the Minister of Food Production of Trinidad and Tobago estimates the number of squatters in Trinidad and Tobago to be about 50,000 out of a total population of 1.2 million people. Interviews with technical staff in the Ministries of Agriculture and Departments of Forestry indicate that squatting is a serious problem. There are many squatters' settlements with poor or no infrastructure and public amenities. Many of the squatters obtain their livelihood from farming.

Squatting is such a major problem in most territories that Governments seem to have little alternative to regularising major squatting areas and providing the basic infrastructure or to providing low-cost housing in identified residential developments. There is need for an associated legislation to prevent further spread of squatting and for adequate institutional arrangements for monitoring and implementing the system.

The problem of squatting has to be addressed in any land use planning to reduce the significant erosion which occurs on squatters' holdings.