

World Bank-commissioned Study on Land conflict, Migration and Citizenship in West Africa

Land and property rights, migration and citizenship are complex issues that cut across all social, economic and political spheres of West Africa. At the core of regional integration and economic development, these issues are also key drivers of conflict and fragility.

The land, migration and citizenship nexus has surfaced in some form or another in almost every civil conflict that has occurred in the sub-region in the past decades. It also increasingly continues to characterize low intensity pastoral violence in the Sahel. The structural challenges related to land, migration and citizenship have, for the most part, remained unchanged and efforts to address them have not yielded a significant impact. This is worrisome as many regional and global trends will only continue to add stress to the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in managing land, migration and citizenship issues.

In this context, and at the request of the World Bank, IOM contributed its expertise to a study entitled “*Land Conflict, Migration and Citizenship in West Africa: Complex Diversity and Recurring Challenges*”. The study formed part of a broader World Bank initiative aimed towards improving its (and that of other development institutions) understanding of how to best help mitigate violence and fragility risks in the region. The paper will also benefit African policy makers and donors working in the region.

Based on an extensive desk review, the research focused on the fifteen

member States of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS)¹.

The paper first lays out the migratory context in West Africa, pointing to the type, nature and extent of mobility in the region. It then sets out the pluralism of land tenure and management systems, and provides an overview of the key land related challenges before, during and after conflict, including in-depth case studies in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

It also illuminates cultural notions of foreigner and outsiders in West African countries, highlighting how the concept of citizenship plays an integral role in struggles over land.

The structural challenges of land, migration and citizenship issues are then explored vis-à-vis the contemporary and regional trends of land scarcity, the growing agri-business sector, population growth and urbanization, socio-generational issues and climate change.

The paper concludes with identifying ways forward in advancing relevant research and policy programming, such as the need for an updated survey of land policies in West Africa and a comparative legal assessment of legal pluralism in land tenure in West Africa.

For more information, kindly contact lpr@iom.int

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.