

'Property Ladder' Helps Poor Gain Land Rights

This story comes from VOA Special English, Voice of America's daily news and information service for English learners. Read the story and then do the worksheet of activities at the end.

This is the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Less than a third of people in developing countries own or have any official right to the land they live on. Groups like UN-Habitat and its partners are working on a simple way to secure land rights for millions of people. Development experts say gaining land rights is important for reducing poverty and increasing economic growth and food production.

Poor people can then use the land as security to get bank loans. Land records can also show foreign investors that the land and the rights of those on it are legally secure. Foreign demand has increased in recent years for agricultural land in Africa, Asia and South America. UN-Habitat official Clarissa Augustinus in Nairobi, Kenya, explains why land records are so important.

CLARISSA AUGUSTINUS: "When an investor goes to the government and says 'I want a piece of land,' the government looks on their maps which show that that particular piece of land is empty, and they give it to an investor. But when the investor goes there and looks at the land, he sees that it is fully occupied by a tribe or a family or whatever."

Forcing the people off the land can harm the image of the investor.

CLARISSA AUGUSTINUS: "It can cause what the European investors are calling reputation risk."

Ownership documents like deeds and titles are rare, she says, because establishing property lines and recording land is expensive.

CLARISSA AUGUSTINUS: "You could be talking a couple of hundred dollars to create a deed or a title. And most countries cannot afford to give the majority of citizens, at this point in time, ownership rights because of the cost of creating it, and most individuals cannot afford to subsidize it."

UN-Habitat says the answer in some countries is to create a series of steps in gaining land rights -- a so-called property ladder. First, people could receive a simple document or starter title to the land they are on. They

would be safe from the threat of being forced off the land by the state or wealthy buyers. Higher steps would provide greater rights. Finally, a majority of a community could decide to allow individual ownership of the land.

Namibia, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia are among the countries adopting property ladders. Ms. Augustinus says Ethiopia has already provided twenty million land certificates on the lower end of the property ladder for about one dollar each.

In Southeast Asia, the United States Agency for International Development is working on a project to help Timor-Leste develop property rights. The first step is an official certificate recognizing a landholder's unopposed claim. East Timor separated from Indonesia in nineteen ninety-nine. The Indonesian army had destroyed land records and forced communities from their land to break up resistance.

Now do the worksheet ...

Level: intermediate - advanced

Time: 30 - 40 minutes

This worksheet will help you learn new vocabulary about land ownership. You will answer questions about the property ladder, and write a short paragraph about owning a home in your country.

1. Match the words on the left with the words on the right to make four phrases. Write the phrase on the line. The answers are in the first paragraph of the article.

| | | |
|---------------|---------------|-------|
| a. developing | 1. growth | _____ |
| b. land | 2. production | _____ |
| c. economic | 3. rights | _____ |
| d. food | 4. countries | _____ |

2. Read paragraphs 6 and 7 in the article again. What does *deed* mean? Check the correct answer.

- papers that show you own a home
- something good that you do

3. Look again at the title of the article: '*Property Ladder*' Helps Poor Gain Land Rights. Which sentence below is true?

- A property ladder is good because it can help poor people buy land.
- A property ladder is bad because it takes rights away from poor people.

4. Read the sentence below. Is it *true* or *false*? If it is false, correct the sentence.

Most people in developing countries own the land they live on.

5. What does UN-Habitat want to do?

6. Why is it important for poor people to gain land rights? Check the correct reasons.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> to reduce poverty | <input type="checkbox"/> to write deeds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to fall off the property ladder | <input type="checkbox"/> to increase food production |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to lose their land growth | <input type="checkbox"/> to increase economic growth |

7. Why don't many people in developing countries have deeds?

8. Read paragraph 8 in the article again. How does a *property ladder* work? Number the following steps in the correct order from 1 - 4.

- _____ A community decides to allow individual ownership of the land.
- _____ Over time they get greater rights.
- _____ People receive a simple document to the land they are on.
- _____ Now they cannot be forced off the land.

9. Complete the following sentence with two numbers.

Ethiopia has already provided _____ million land certificates on the lower end of the property ladder for about _____ dollar each.

10. What did the Indonesian army do in East Timor to break up resistance?

OVER TO YOU

How easy is it for people in your country to own land? Do you want to own your own home? Why / Why not? Write 5 sentences explaining your answer.

ANSWER KEY

1. developing countries, land rights, economic growth, food production
2. papers that show you own a home
3. A property ladder is good because it can help poor people buy land.
4. false; Less than a third of people in developing countries own the land they live on.
5. They want to help secure land rights for millions of people.
6. to reduce poverty, to increase food production, to increase economic growth
7. establishing property lines and recording land is expensive.
8. ___4___ A community decides to allow individual ownership of the land.
___3___ Over time they get greater rights.
___1___ People receive a simple document to the land they are on.
___2___ Now they cannot be forced off the land.
9. Ethiopia has already provided twenty million land certificates on the lower end of the property ladder for about one dollar each.
10. They destroyed land records and forced communities from their land.