

Towards equitable and secure access to land and natural resources for family farmers in the Mekong region



Thematic Study

October 2017

Community Land Titling in Thailand

The legal evolution and piloting of titling policy



***RCSD - Mekong Land Research Forum
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Thematic Study

Written by Daniel Hayward

For more information, contact:

Daniel Hayward, Mekong Research Land Forum: <mekonglandforum@gmail.com>

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Cover photo: Looking at Community Land Titling in Mae Tha sub-district during a study tour for Lao and Myanmar officials, March 2016, by Chaiyapat Sukpanon, licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

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List of Acronyms

ALRO	Agricultural Land Reform Office
DOL	Department of Land
CLT	Community Land Titling
CLTO	Community Land Titling Office
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
LEI	Land Equity International
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRLG	Mekong Region Land Governance
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
RFD	Royal Forestry Department
TLTP	Thai Land Titling Programme
WB	World Bank

Introduction

The purpose of this thematic study is to provide a comprehensive overview of land tenure systems in Thailand, with a focus upon the recent development of community land titling (CLT) programmes. It is hoped that the clarification and dissemination of such information will act as a useful point of reference for policy-makers and other related stakeholders around the region. As land systems are formalised, community land titling represents a mechanism to enshrine and protect local ownership and use rights. The experience of Thailand can act as a marker for the introduction, formalisation, implementation and administration of such titles, facilitating parallel initiatives in neighbouring countries.

This thematic study was prepared by the Mekong Land Research Forum, under leadership of the Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG) project. It follows a visit of Lao and Myanmar officials to Chiang Mai province in northern Thailand, looking at Community Land Titling pilot projects. The study acts to complement the experiences of this visit, documenting information for a general background on CLT. Section 1 offers a brief geographical, economic and social overview of Thailand. Section 2 outlines the general development of policy in land governance over the last hundred years, and highlights the different government departments involved. Finally, section 3 focuses attention upon community land titling and its legal advancement.

The production of this thematic study has been gratefully assisted by the comments of Assistant Professor Dr Chusak Wittayapak at Chiang Mai University, alongside consultation with the Northern Development Foundation. Professor Philip Hirsch of Chiang Mai University reviewed an early draft. Finally, Weerakan Kengkaj was instrumental in sourcing material and instigating interviews that contributed to this final product.

Country Context

Demography, Geography and Land Use

Thailand covers an area of 513,120 km² (figure 1). In 2014, the population stood at 67.73 million people, globally the 21st highest (World Bank, 2014). 95.9% of this population is made up of ethnic Tai, making it less diverse than other countries in the region (CIA, 2015). Four principal geographical areas can be highlighted, namely the North, Northeast, Centre and South (USAID, 2011). Social and political national life is dominated by the capital Bangkok, situated amongst fertile plains in the central part of the country; the mountainous north sees a dominance of rice cultivation in its large valleys, with cash crops cultivated on the steeper slopes of upland areas; the less affluent northeast has focused on rain-fed rice farming on flatlands, and cash crops on previously forested highland areas; the south hosts a patchwork of rubber on steeper slopes, rice in its valleys and shrimp farming along an extensive coastline. Overall, around 41% of land is agricultural, with half of this area supporting rice farming (Lamb, 2015; USAID, 2011). 43% of the total land area has been designated as forestland, although actual forest cover has been measured at 33% (RECOFTC, 2014). Of designated forest area, one third has been classified for conservation, and one third as national forest.



Figure 1: Map of Thailand

(Source: http://www.lib.ute.xas.edu/maps/cia15/thailand_sm_2015.gif)

Economic and Social Development

From 1986 to 1996, Thailand achieved high economic growth reaching into double digits, gaining the country a reputation as a development success story (World Bank, 2014). However, following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, and the collapse of the Thai baht, the economy has yet to return to previous levels of growth, showing great susceptibility to global trends such as the economic downturn after 2008. Nevertheless, in socio-economic terms at the macro-level, Thailand has successfully negotiated a path to upper-middle income status, following World Bank measurements (ADB, 2014). In 2014, the national GDP was \$404.8 billion (at market prices), with a GDP per capita of \$5,977 (World Bank, 2014). As the second largest economy in ASEAN and GMS, it retains a 'significant role in promoting regional cooperation and integration' (ibid).

For a long time, Thailand was the world's largest exporter of rice, although it has now been surpassed by India, and is also a significant exporter of shrimp. Agriculture remains a central national livelihood, particularly in terms of employment for a rural majority, even if the contribution to the national economy has diminished (10.4% of GDP in 2013). Of greater significance here has been strong growth in diversified industry and construction (37.7% GDP share), including the development of car manufacturing for the ASEAN market, and in electronics and textiles. Meanwhile, the service industry carries an even higher GDP share at 51.9% (CIA, 2015), bolstered by a large tourist trade and a competitive financial sector. It must also not be forgotten that the informal sector makes a large contribution to the national economy, providing up to 50% of GDP (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 17).

In terms of social development, the human development index (HDI), accounting for measures in education and health next to the economy, stood at 0.690 in 2013, placing Thailand 103 out of 187 countries at the top of the medium category (UNDP, 2014). Utility service provisions are high, with literacy and access to healthcare almost universal (UNDP, 2014). Poverty was reduced from 42.6% in 2000 to 12.6% in 2012. However, the country has performed poorly in terms of economic equality, following a widening income gap during high growth in the 1980s (figure 2). Represented by a Gini coefficient, despite recent decreases, the levels remain higher than regional neighbours and similar transitional countries (UNDP, 2014, p. 3). Inequality in land holdings performs even worse. In the first study of its kind, following unprecedented access to the Land Department database, the distribution of fully titled land ('Chanote') in 2012 provides a Gini coefficient of 0.886, compared to a coefficient of 0.485 for household income (Laovakul, 2015). This represents the fact that the top ten percent owns 61.5% of fully titled landholdings and the lowest ten percent 0.07%.

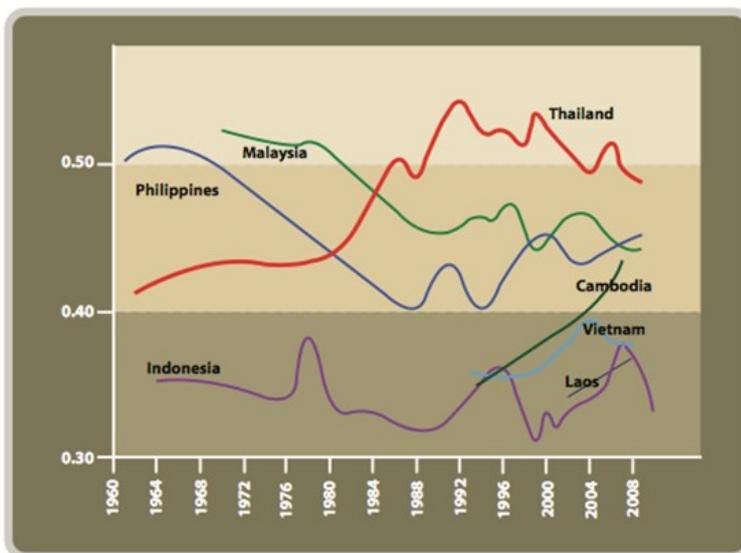


Figure 2: Income inequality in ASEAN countries (Gini coefficient), 1960-2012

(Source: UNDP, 2014, p. 63)

2. Land Policy

At the turn of the twentieth century, when still named Siam, all land belonged to the king, from which people could lay claim to provide for their family. Customary systems enshrined local land use, with forest areas regarded as commons (Lohmann, 1993). Larger formal arrangements had been created for the collection of tax, or through trade agreements with foreign powers. Although Siam was never formally colonised, it did take extensive inspiration from these powers for the development of legal and administrative systems (Brits et al., 2002; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995).

To appreciate the system that subsequently developed, one must acknowledge a tension between private and state forms of land ownership. The timeline above (figure 3) highlights the principal pieces of legislation within these different systems, which are looked at in turn.

Private Tenure

1901 Land Law

Responding to population growth and the commercialisation of agriculture (Sato, 2000, p. 158), title by registration was adopted, using the Australian Torrens system. This was centralised and administered by the newly formed Department of Land (DOL) within the Ministry of the Interior (Feder et al., 1988; Rattanabirabongse et al., 1998). The law was applied principally in the Central Plains, hardly affecting the outer regions of the kingdom.

The 1954 Land Code

With the dismantling of absolute monarchy in 1932, and the nation of Thailand established, the platform was provided for a full transition to private land ownership. The 1954 Land Code laid out the basic titling forms that exist today, with rights

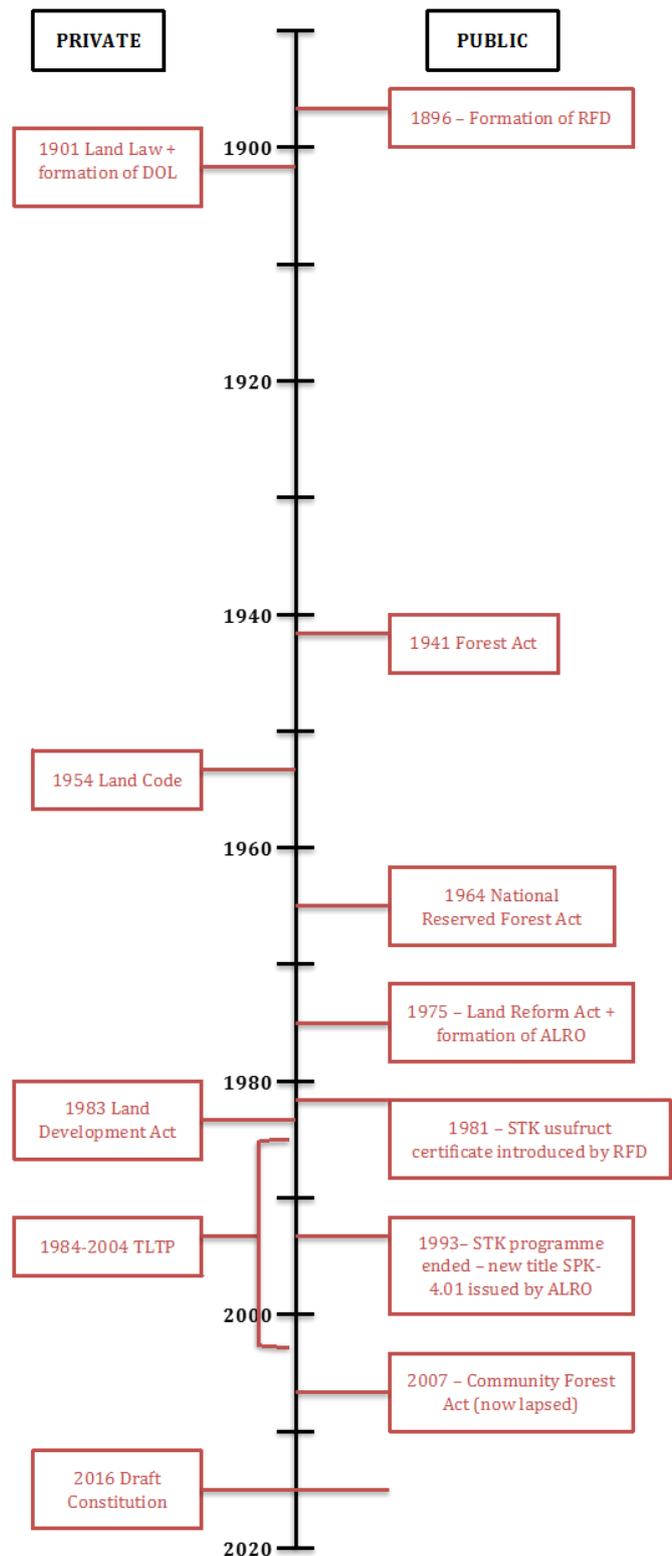


Figure 3: A timeline of land policy in Thailand (for acronyms see p.ii)

officially passed onto citizens for the first time. The NS-4 ('Chanote') deed offers fully unrestricted rights allowing sale, rental, division, inheritance, and mortgage of land. The NS-3 (and NS-3K from 1972) represents a similarly secure transitional title, and the NS-2 a 'pre-emptive' temporary deed of five years that would theoretically be upgraded to full rights upon its renewal. The SK-1 'claim' certificate registers an application for land that might later be formalised with an NS deed, based on occupation or use prior to 1954. The 1954 code also introduced the concept of idle land to encourage greater productive use, with punitive measures for unlawful registration or forged documentation (Lamb, 2015; Lubanski, 2012). Administration was carried out by the DOL.

The Thai Land Titling Programme (TLTP): 1984-2004

Following the 1983 Land Development Act, in 1984 the TLTP was introduced to increase efficiency, insert technological improvements and speed up the titling process. Using World Bank funding, AusAID technical assistance and the private contractor Land Equity International (LEI), it was the largest such programme in the world, perceived as a huge success and taken as a model for other countries to follow (Brits et al., 2002; Hirsch, 2011; Rattanabirabongse et al., 1998). By 1998, over 19 million titles had been distributed compared to 4 million when the project started (Hirsch, 2011, p. 4). Initially administered by the Bangkok-based DOL, work was gradually passed on to metropolitan, provincial and local-branch authorities, although strong central monitoring was maintained. After four phases, the project was completed in 2004, receiving the World Bank's highest award of excellence. About 63% of 30 million land parcels in Thailand are now registered, and 90% of transactions are generally completed within a day (USAID, 2011, p. 7). Critics claim the TLTP favours wealthy landowners, thereby contributing to growing inequality in Thailand. They also note an inability to provide legal status to those in state-owned forest areas (Lamb, 2015; Lubanski, 2012).

State-Owned Land

The Royal Forestry Department (RFD), a branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, was formed in 1896 as an attempt to stave off the monopolisation of the teak trade by foreign powers. Following the creation of the Thai nation-state, subsequent legislation attempted to shore up public land ownership and start processes of demarcation. The 1941 Forest Act proclaimed that forests consisted of 'all land that does not belong to any individual by law' (Sato, 2000, p. 159), foregoing any mention of tree cover.

1964 National Reserved Forest Act

In 1961, a cabinet decree designated 50% of land in Thailand as state-owned forestry (Gine, 2005). The 1964 National Reserved Forest Act adjusted this figure to 45%, and clarified terms of designation and rules for usage (Fujita, 2003; Gine, 2005; Hall, Hirsch, & Li, 2011).

1975 Land Reform Act

As a partial reaction to populist protest movements, the 1975 Land Reform Act acknowledged a high rate of farmer tenancy and landlessness in Thailand, and the encroachment of cultivators onto public lands, influenced by unclear demarcation and poor enforcement of rules (Gine, 2005; Lamb, 2015; Lubanski, 2012). Although aiming towards land redistribution, the Act settled on the formalisation or promotion of settlements in forest reserve areas (Hall et al., 2011, p. 216). The Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) was formed, to lease out or allocate land to occupants of the public estate.

1981 Introduction of usufruct land certificates

In the 1980s, the majority of the working population in Thailand was still engaged in agriculture. Forest cover was diminishing from 66% of national land pre-Second World War to around 15% in 1993 (Lohmann, 1993, p. 180). Under pressures of population growth, commercial logging (eventually banned in 1989), infrastructure projects and agriculture, policy shifted towards preservation over exploitation (Fujita, 2003). Yet around 20% of official forest reserves were occupied by communities, where boundaries frequently did not reflect actual forest cover (Hirsch, 1990; USAID, 2011). Therefore, in 1981, to accommodate the presence of farmers on public land, usufruct certificates (STK) were handed out by the RFD, a temporary 5-year deed for a maximum of 2.4 hectares, carrying limited rights (Feder et al., 1988; Gine, 2005; Lohmann, 1993; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995).

Various attempts have been made to account for farmer presence in protected lands (see the example of the *khor jor kor* scheme in box 1). When the STK programme ended in 1993, an equivalent usufruct certificate (SPK-4.01) was made available from the ALRO. Although degraded forestland was redistributed to farmers, such plots retained protected status (Brits et al., 2002; Fujita, 2003; Gine, 2005; Hall et al., 2011). Attempts have been made to extend the rights of the SPK certificate. Most notably, in the previous decade Thaksin Shinawatra identified the potential to include mortgaging of such land, theoretically offering a source of capital to the poor, and creating a new stream of tax revenue (Limsamarnphun, 2002). The proposal was not enacted, with land remaining in public hands.

Box 1: *Khor jor kor*

The *khor jor kor* scheme, implemented at the beginning of the 1990s, attempted to resettle farmers operating in degraded forest areas onto new land with longer-term tenure security (Hirsch, 1993, pp. 20–23). Officially the scheme aimed to balance between reforestation and farmer welfare. Yet suspicions were raised the land was being acquired for commercial interests (feeding the paper industry), and protests led to its suspension in 1992

2007 Community Forestry Bill

The Community Forestry Bill offered rights to communities who had lived in forest reserves prior to 1997, entering into an agreement with RFD for assistance with the preservation and management of such areas (Lubanski, 2012; USAID, 2011). Criticized by both conservationists and land rights activists, the Bill nevertheless passed the National Legislative Assembly in 2007. However, due to an inability to attract consensus across different government departments, the bureaucratic nature of proposed policy, and its marginalisation against political instability of the time, by 2009 it had lapsed (Fisher, 2011).

Governance Structure

In the 1990s, up to fourteen government agencies were involved in the allocation of land (Hall et al., 2011, p. 43). Figure 4 highlights the principal agencies presently involved, including the formation of the Community Land Titling Office (CLTO) through the Office of the Prime Minister. Implementation of land policy also takes through the Office of the Prime Minister. Implementation of land policy also takes place through local administration authorities. The *tambon* or sub-district incurs various responsibilities, including the management of local titling and settlement issues.

They may also impose authority over community forests and buffer-zone management (USAID, 2011, p. 16). Coordination and consistent implementation of land policy has proved problematic through these differing actors, as proved by the failure of Community Forestry Bill. In particular, tensions arise between an individualized private land market and protected state-owned land, with stakeholder demands frequently at odds.

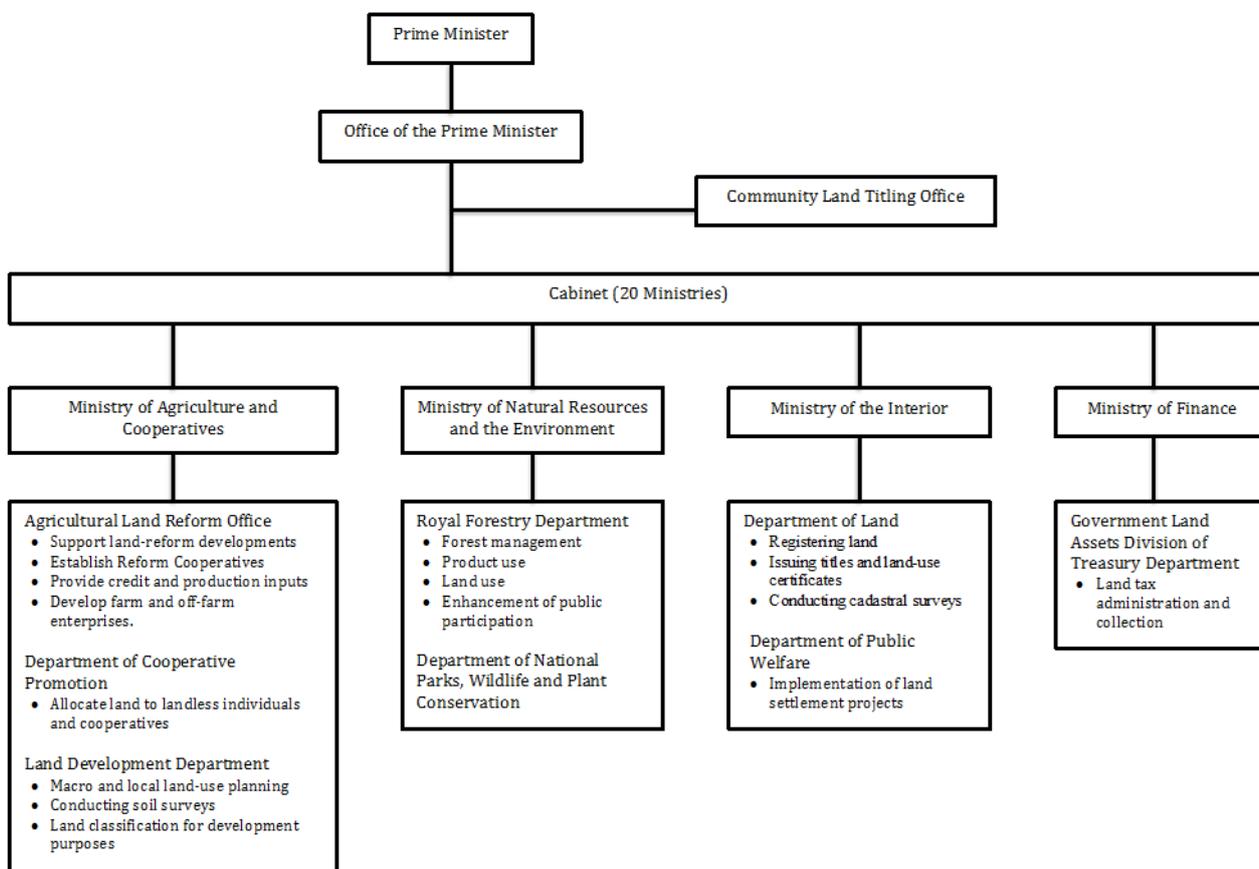


Figure 4: Government departments involved in land titling and administration (Source: Lubanski, 2012; USAID, 2011)

3. Community Land Titling in Thailand

In spite of the various policy actions and reforms over the years, the issue of landlessness and land insecurity remains a pertinent issue in Thailand. In 2012, the Northern Land Reform Network estimated 8.2 million landless or nearly landless people, including 1.2 million people within protected forest areas, and 1.5 million inhabitants within urban slums lacking land documents (Lubanski, 2012, p. 133). Many of the specific policy debates have centred on a conflict between private and state-land, viewed alternately as a tension between commoditised or protected land. The examples of STK, SPK or Khor Jor Kor schemes highlight this tension. Following the failed implementation of the Community Forestry Bill, a land reform movement has promoted the instigation of four policy developments, the so-called 4 laws for the poor (NDF, 2014), which in combination could alleviate socio-economic pressures around landlessness:

- Community Land Titling (CLT)
- Progressive Land Tax
- National Land Bank
- Justice Fund

A progressive land tax would discourage land speculation, acting to bolster laws against leaving land idle. In national terms, it could have a double-edged effect of increasing government revenue and reducing inequality in Thailand (Ananapibut, 2015, p. 172). A national land bank could access the funds from a progressive land tax, facilitating the reclamation and redistribution of idle lands, thereby freeing up a resource for productive use, and potentially supporting those suffering from landlessness or land insecurity. A Justice Fund would further assist less wealthy smallholders, providing access to legal means to challenge contentious land claims. Through CLT, local community land banks can be set up, allowing plots to be held up as collateral, and promoting exchange within the community. Mechanisms for community forestry can be enshrined, enforced and monitored through local CLT-based regulation. A combination of these policies could impact upon a range of possible community groups, including inhabitants of informal urban settlements, mountain groups (including ethnic minorities) living in protected forest areas, and landless lowland farmers (Lubanski, 2012; USAID, 2011).

Advantages for the implementation of CLT include:

- Counter ambiguity of population presence on state-owned forest land, drawing a line against further encroachment
- Legitimize land use within public forest areas, controlling agricultural practices and improving forest management
- Avoid sales to outsiders for short-term financial fix
- Counteract threat of growing land inequality and idle land
- Internal community setting of rules and monitoring
- Land transactions or exchanges remain within and are decided by the community
- System allows for provision of local Community Land Bank, where plots can be used as collateral

Disadvantages include:

- CLT runs counter to free market principles
- Lack of documentation at the local level, which is needed to apply for CLT
- Mistrust of community management of protected forest areas
- Demand for internal community unity, including the enforcement and monitoring of local rules
- Tension with processes of de-agrarianisation

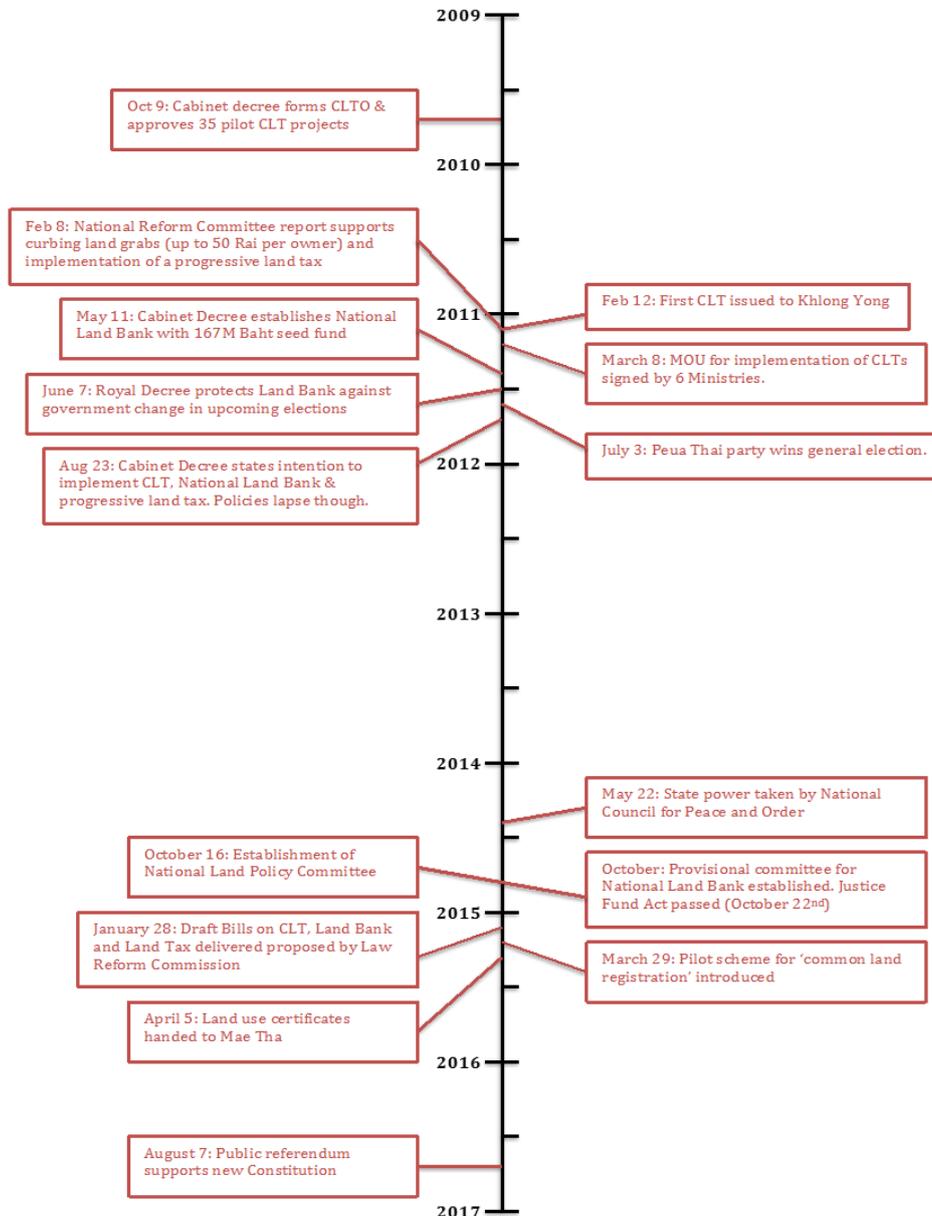


Figure 5: A timeline of CLT-related policy developments in Thailand

(Source: Lamb, 2015; Lubanski, 2012; USAID, 2011, interview with Northern Development Foundation, 14th September 2016)

Policy Developments

A timeline on CLT and associated policies can be found in figure 5. In 2009, a cabinet decree under the Democrat Party-led government of Abhisit Vejjajiva set up the Community Land Title Office (CLTO), allowing the issuance of Community Land Titles. Specifically, the decree supported titles for farmers occupying state-land that no longer contained forest cover (USAID, 2011, p. 7). Initial approval was given for 35 pilot communities. Eventually, titles were awarded to four communities, Khlong Yong in Nakhornprathom province west of Bangkok, Mae Awe and Rai Dong in the northern province of Lamphun, and Prathadkhingkae in neighbouring Phayao. Initially, the decree was not legally binding, so in 2011 an MOU was drafted to force recognition and speed up implementation. Six Ministries signed (Natural Resources and Environment, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Interior, Finance, Social Development and Human Security, and Justice), although resistance through different departmental agendas held back operationalization of CLT policy. In particular, CLT was seen as a threat to conservation ideals, and therefore has been approached with suspicion by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Lamb, 2015, p. 21). Furthermore, although a parcel held under CLT could be transferred through inheritance, land post-2009 could not be mortgaged, with titles thereby retaining a status as leasehold from the state.

A cabinet decree issued on May 11th 2011 called for the establishment of a National Land Bank. A 5-year period was stated within which full implementation was demanded, with a provision of 690 million baht. An initial seed fund of 167 million baht was stipulated to support five communities in the north of Thailand. However, the project stalled as the government failed to set up the steering committee necessary to formalise implementation. The decree also called for a progressive land tax, although no further action was taken on this initiative.

After elections in July 2011, the advent of Yingluck Shinawatra's Pheu Thai government brought CLT, banking and tax policies to a standstill. Only one CLT was handed out in this period, namely to Prathadkhingkae in Phayao. By January 2012, 435 communities had formally applied for a CLT with only 55 approvals (but no further certificates) given out by the Community Land Titling Office (Lubanski, 2012, p. 56). On May 22nd 2014, the military seized power in Thailand, and established a government under Prayut Chan-o-cha and the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). Of significance was the restating of a target for 40% state-owned forestland, shifting the narrative of land use back towards the notion of farmer encroachment. This has resulted in a concerted effort to reclaim land under the following criteria:

- Using a map of 2002
- Reclaim land on a slope more than 35 degrees
- Higher altitude

(interview with Northern Development Foundation, 14th September 2016)

On 16th October 2014, the National Land Policy Committee was set up with a broad remit covering the allocation of lands to landless people, increased productivity, environmental protection, and stamping out corruption. At a meeting on March 29th 2015 (1/2015), a new pilot scheme of 'common land registration' (*thii din plaeng ruam*), also known as KTC (*khana kammakarn nayobai thidin haengchat*), was introduced. The aim is to reallocate land for local use over a period of 30 years, with operationalization of the project sub-contracted to the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). This seems to have superseded CLT, representing a form of leasehold where the state retains stronger control. The policy can be seen as an attempt to legitimize certain forms of land use in forest areas, but stamp down on further encroachment. Participation in the

scheme demands local assistance in forest management and protection measures. Proposals were gathered for 80 areas in 47 provinces covering a total land area of 325,205 rai. The first recipient was Mae Tha in Chiang Mai province, northern Thailand. On 5th April, land use permits were handed out in the presence of the Prime Minister (figure 6), offering usage rights for 30 years but not rights of mortgage, sale or transfer. 7,282 rai of land were involved, engaging 1,235 families (NNT, 2015). Previously, Mae Tha had been pushing hard for CLT. A titling programme was conducted in 2011, creating a book of community rights that was recognized by the local (tambon) authorities. By joining the 'common land registration' scheme, nationally approved titles were obtained, albeit with certification stopping short of the rights promoted through CLT. Alongside Mae Tha, phase 1 of the project involves 55,000 rai in 4 provinces (Chiang Mai, Chumphon, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Phanom). All of these areas involve state-owned forestland. Phase 2 aims to register 51,929 rai of forestland in 8 provinces and 5,585 rai of SPK-titled land. However, beyond this official program, in actuality it seems that after Mae Tha only areas in four districts of Nan Province (namely Na Noi, Ban Luang, Song Khwae, and Tha Wang Pha) have received the government-sanctioned certificates.

In October 2015, the National Land Bank was formally established through the creation of a provisional committee. This committee has now been made official, and includes members from government, land specialists and representatives of civil society. By doing so, the original decree for the creation of a National Land Bank, which otherwise would have lapsed in May 2016, could be extended. However, the initial seed fund of 167 million baht remains unused, and civil society pressure is calling for implementation to avoid another five years of stagnation.

A Justice Fund was first set up in 2006, and up to 2016 has dealt with over 18,000 cases using more than 500 million baht on legal aid (NNT, 2016). On 22nd October, the Justice Fund Act was passed, attempting to improve accessibility. This also preceded the transfer of administration and implementation from the Ministry of Justice to the Rights and Liberties Protection Department. The Fund comprises an annual government budget and up to 5% of all fines issued by the court of justice.



Figure 6: Land use permits under the 'common land registration' scheme are issued in Mae Tha, in the presence of the Thai premier, Prayut Chan-o-Cha

(Source: Mae Tha sub-district Office)

Perhaps most surprisingly, there is some movement on a Progressive Land Tax. The land and buildings tax, proposed by the Deputy Finance Minister in February 2017, is progressive and will incrementally target idle land (Chantanusornsiri, 2017). While a positive step in discouraging speculation, and increasing a tax base resource for national government, critics will claim that the rate remains too low to have any influence upon wealthy landowners.

Comments

The range of interests amongst different stakeholders, from forest protection to macro-economic growth to social equity, makes consensus on a land rights system hard to reach. The narrative of farmer encroachment as a core cause of forest degradation acts as a barrier to progressive policy that could seize on their potential as forest managers. Even if attitudes were to shift, the associative policy requirements for effective CLT counters the commercial interests of many policy makers. In particular, the possibility of an effective progressive land tax is slim, regardless of the argument that it could actually improve productive use of land. The proposal for a land and buildings tax in 2017 is a starting point, and offers potential avenues for future advocacy in this area. Inevitably, the suspension of democratic processes in Thailand brings uncertainty to the emergence of policy related to CLT. Furthermore, on August 7th 2016, a public referendum gave overwhelming support to a new National Constitution. The draft of this document has stripped away any mention of community rights, leaving local land users open to future vulnerabilities, unable to challenge state-sponsored development projects, which can proceed without the need for environmental impact assessments (Areerat, 2016; The Asia Foundation, 2016).

The example of Mae Tha shows that gaining official recognition for localised community projects is possible. By recognizing local land use, promoting forest management, and undertaking clear zoning, a localised CLT project placed the sub-district as a strong candidate for the subsequent 'common land registration' pilot scheme. By implication, local initiatives counter the dangers of idle land and speculation without having to rely upon the development of state regulation. However, the new state-sponsored scheme stops short of the security offered by CLT, and minimizes the opportunity to implement the latter. Indeed, with the Prayut government promoting 40% state-owned forestland, there is a squeeze for reclamation rather than new titling schemes. The NCPO has stated a desire to enact 'common land registration' as a law, which if passed, would leave very little room for CLT. Nevertheless, there is evidence that individual communities continue to set up their own system (often with some NGO support, yet outside of established farmer groups and networks), gaining support from the sub-district level, and requesting legitimisation up to the level of provincial governor (Lubanski, 2017). Administrative decentralization in Thailand offers a means to work from the bottom-up, and while security of tenure may lack national recognition, these localised programmes demand attention. Therefore, while national policy may try to monopolise titling opportunities, and the present military government moves in a direction of re-centralized power, there remains potential in the promotion of CLT on a case-by-case basis.

The role of civil society pressure groups is an interesting one. A coalition exists that has used different component/collectives names over the years (including P-Move, Northern Land Reform Network, Northern Development Foundation). Treading a fine line between various political conflicts within Thailand, dialogue has been maintained with various state powers, and continues to manoeuvre for space to improve community land rights, pressuring for the inclusion of CLT within any law on 'common land registration'. A presence on the National Land Bank committee demonstrates a certain level of political authority, and such voices have contributed to the establishment of the Justice Fund. Pressure must be maintained if spaces for local rights are to be opened up, promoting users as managers of increasingly squeezed resources, rather than framed as the problem.

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The Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG) Project aims to contribute to the design of appropriate land policies and practices in the Mekong Region. It responds to national priorities in terms of reducing poverty, improving tenure security, increasing economic development, and supporting family farmers, so that they can be secure and make good decisions on land use and land management.

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The Mekong Land Research Forum encourages research on land governance in the Mekong Region, connects researchers, and facilitates ready access to their work. It promotes discussion and debate, the sharing of knowledge, and supports the training of a new generation of land researchers. The Forum is housed at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University.

The MRLG Thematic Study series examines major themes related to land tenure in the Mekong Region. It is aligned with strategic priorities of MRLG and is intended as background document for all relevant MRLG partners. As such, the series consists of a synthesis of existing references in a particular theme, which can be complemented with additional enquiries and studies. The production of Thematic Study is usually undertaken at the initiative of MRLG but we also accommodate proposals originating from outside the programme.

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