

**Short report on the UN ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review 30 June – 3 July 2008**  
Report prepared by Sonja Vermeulen, International Institute for Environment and Development, on behalf of the International Land Coalition (present 2&3 July)

This meeting was the second in a series of Annual Ministerial Reviews, which have the purpose of assessing and advancing progress in implementation of the UN international development agenda. Several sub-meetings and a global consultation with a range of non-governmental stakeholders preceded the meeting. The main participants at the meeting were ministers of member countries, some of whom gave voluntary reviews on progress in achieving development goals such as the MDGs. Issues of land tenure and resource control came to the fore when real case examples were given (e.g. presentation of a Vietnam-Belgium partnership to improve access to sanitation in Ho Chi Minh City). The meeting culminated in a ministerial declaration, which focused on high-level statements about environment, energy, climate change, finance and technology transfer, without any overt reference to land tenure or local control over resources. Notably, the respondents in the global stakeholder consultation, who included many representatives of civil society, also did not collectively give priority to land tenure as a driver of or important consideration in sustainable development.

Interesting thematic roundtables supplemented the national presentations and deliberations. One on “The role of ecosystem services in sustainable development” entailed presentations from Achim Steiner (Executive Director, UNEP), Ahmed Djaghlaif (Executive Secretary, CBD), Hillary Masundire (Chair of Commission on Ecosystem Management, IUCN), Dane Gobin (Director General, Iwokrama, Guyana), Magnus Ngoile (Director General, Natural Environment Council, Tanzania) and Jorge Mario Rodriguez (Director, National Forest Financing Fund, Costa Rica). As in the general forum, issues of land tenure were conspicuously absent from the more general presentations, but came out in contributions from the floor (UN-Habitat in particular) and the real case examples from Costa Rica and Guyana. A remarkable – though perhaps not readily replicable – arrangement was set up four months ago between Iwokrama and the financiers Canopy Capital, in which Canopy Capital market the ecosystem services provided by Iwokrama, without the Iwokrama forest-owning community relinquishing any aspect of control over the land and its resources.

The thematic roundtable on “Bioenergy, sustainable livelihoods and the rural poor” had presentations from Alexander Muller (Assistant Director General, FAO), Sonja Vermeulen (Director, Programme on Business and Sustainable Development, IIED, on behalf of the ILC), Lionel Lopez (Director, Technoserve, Guatemala) and Suzanne Hunt (independent consultant). The speakers presented in turn an overview of global population, food and fuel trends (FAO), biofuels and poor people’s access to land (IIED/ILC), a pilot scheme for small-scale jatropha production (Technoserve) and emerging issues in governance of the international biofuel industry. There was about one and a half hours for interventions from the floor – with a lively exchange among the many government and civil society representatives present. Key issues raised with respect to land included a statement on the central role of women in farming and land management, a call for governments to promote biofuels only in as far as they are not a

threat to food sovereignty, and a comment on the difficulty of building standards for biofuels that take into account both environmental considerations and social considerations such as land tenure. There was a tendency however for the discussion to stray from the stated topic of the roundtable – the impacts of biofuels on the rural poor – to more general issues of national and global food and energy security, hardly surprising given the complexity and interconnectedness of food, fuel, agriculture and climate change globally today.

Key issues arising for ILC from this meeting include:

- Overall: In the debate at ministerial level on food, fuel and climate change, land tenure appears to be fairly low profile at present. ILC members might want to increase lobbying efforts among their governments?
- Environmental services: Emphasis on conservation and maintenance of environmental services could go two ways for poor people's access to land: more exclusion as governments and businesses prioritise "environment for the general public good" over "rights to local resources among local people", or else stronger land tenure as local people are increasingly recognised as crucial stewards of environmental services. ILC members might want to shape convincing arguments to encourage the second outcome.
- Biofuels: Land tenure issues are critical in determining whether biofuels will help poor rural people, by providing more diverse market opportunities and higher prices for crops, plus jobs and rural development spin-offs, or increasingly exclude them from access to land as the value of agriculture and land go up, and large-scale operators occupy large areas of land. There are existing good (though not perfect) models for small-scale farmers to use their land to produce biofuel crops, either for local energy provision or to sell into national or international biofuel industries – e.g. land pooling, lease arrangements, purchase quotas and joint ventures. But it is critical for governments to support small-scale farmers and communal land owners – to recognise and defend their rights in the face of contesting interests – in order for the opportunities to prevail over the threats of biofuels to poor rural people. ILC members will need to be campaigning actively on this front as the biofuels industry is developing rapidly.

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[www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/amr/nationalpolicies](http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/amr/nationalpolicies)