



# The Importance of Land and Resource Rights in Achieving the MDGs

Three quarters of the world's poor – approximately 900 million people – live in rural areas and depend on access to land and other natural resources for their livelihoods. In order to halve global poverty by 2015, as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), access to land for the rural poor and landless must be at the center of national and international policies.

Access to land and secure rights over natural resources is fundamentally linked to the three pillars for achieving the MDGs, as described in the Secretary-General's report: *Toward a Larger Freedom*.

## Development

Secure access to land when linked with access to the productive factors of credit, technical support and markets, makes land rights the most realistic way for poor families to contribute to, and benefit from, national development.

## Human Rights

Poverty is directly linked to exclusion from political processes and basic human rights. Improved access to land and respect for the land rights of the poor is a starting point in establishing respect for human rights, including equal rights of women and the rights of indigenous peoples.

## Security

Conflicts around the world are linked to the use and control of land and other natural resources. These conflicts constrain economic opportunities, create environmental damage and, at their most extreme, lead to loss of human life. Poor households and communities all too often bear the heaviest burdens of land-related conflicts.

Strengthening the rights of poor men and women to land, property and natural resources is indispensable to achieving the MDGs:

**Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.**

Where their rights to land are secure, and other production services made available, poor men and women can improve production and income – from both agricultural and non-agricultural sources – improving their food security and reducing hunger.

**Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.**

Without recognition of their rights, families residing on disputed land may be denied access to basic public services, including education for their children. Improved land access assists households to generate income and reduces the time children work to help support their families. The results include being able to pay school fees and increased school attendance.

**Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.**

Women in developing countries own less than two percent of all land and receive less than five percent of all support services, despite playing a pivotal role in agriculture and household food security. Secure land rights for women contribute not only to economic empowerment for poor families, but also increases women's social and political power – contributing to a reduction in child mortality and improvements in maternal health (goals 4 and 5).

**Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.**

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has highlighted the consequences of women not having land rights or inheritance rights to their husbands land. Not only do these women lose their families' source of livelihood, they often have no choice but to enter into other relationships which may increase their own risk of becoming infected. This results in malnutrition and food insecurity, and has an adverse effect on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

**Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.**

The real causes of resource degradation are rooted in imbalances of power, wealth, knowledge and access to resources. If poor rural households lack secure land rights, they are compelled to adopt short-term survival strategies that have negative environmental impacts. Moreover, smallholder production generally carries less environmental risk than large-scale commercial production.

**Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.**

Land access and land use involves many complex social, economic, cultural and political relations. It is more than simply a productive asset or locus for investment. It is crucial that poor men and women whose livelihoods are directly affected by land and resource policies, have the opportunity to participate in policy formulation and decision-making processes and partnerships at local, national and global levels.

The International Land Coalition is an alliance of United Nations and other intergovernmental agencies including the World Bank and the European Commission; civil-society organizations; and governments. The Land Coalition's mission is to increase secure access to land and productive resources by poor men and women, and to create opportunities for direct participation at all levels in decision-making on land issues.

Since 1995, the Land Coalition has worked with its Members and Partners to highlight the importance of land access in an integrated approach to development, and to foster consensus on ways to overcome key land policy challenges. The Land Coalition convenes dialogue and debate on land-related issues at United Nations forums, such as CSD, CSW and ECOSOC, and supports the efforts of its country-level partners to increase democratic participation in national land policy reform.

**International Land Coalition**

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