

CREATING PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT What Role Can Land Rights Play?

As in each of the past three years, ILC was invited to convene a Ministerial Roundtable at the 2006 High Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC), held in Geneva in July. Under this year's theme "Creating and Productive Employment and Decent Work" the ILC promoted wider understandings of the important contribution that secure access to land can make to this objective.

ILC always involves one or more of its partners as keynote speakers in these sessions in order to give practical insight on the relationship of access to land and the annual theme of ECOSOC. For 2006, ILC was able to expand its involvement by having the President of the Association of Farmers' Development Committees (CODECA), actively involved in the preparatory meeting at earlier in 2006 at the UN in New York, where the findings of their recent study on working conditions among farm works in Guatemala was presented. For the Geneva session, ILC invited Rose Mwebeza, Executive Director of the Ugandan Land Alliance to make the keynote address. Ms. Mwebeza drew attention to the changing demographics in rural Uganda, all which indicate that with population growth, land will become scarce and large numbers of people who today earn their living from their family farm or plot, will be force off of the land. Under this projection, poverty will increase unless the conditions of work improve for farm workers and new rural employment opportunities are also created. Four case studies from ILC partners from Guatemala, India, Niger and the Philippines were distributed to illustrate further the nexus of land, employment and decent conditions of work.

The roundable was attended by over thirty ambassadors and delegates from members states, and senior officials of the UN systems, including Lennart Båge, President of IFAD. The participants brought forward many important ideas, including:

- The highest rates of poverty reduction have taken place where there was increased agricultural productivity and employment.
- For every dollar invested in agriculture, there is a two dollar multiplier effect on the overall national economy
- Security of property rights is fundamental not only because clear ownership title conveys a fungible asset, but it enables productivity growth since farmers are confident that they will be the beneficiaries of land improvements that they make with their own investments and labour
- Land management need not rely solely on individual property rights. Land held in common could be the basis for allocating its use among individuals.
- Use of non-equity based collateral for credit was highlighted using examples of collateral based on crop yields, and citing situations where the use of mentors provided confidence to lenders about the viability of providing credit

The official issues paper for the Ministerial Session can be found on the ILC website along with the issues papers for all prior years.