



The INTERNATIONAL LAND COALITION

Expanding the Land Policy Dialogue
within and across Countries

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Frequently, civil-society, governmental and intergovernmental organizations are pursuing what seem to be parallel paths and objectives, but due to historical events they face cleavages that can be difficult to bridge. At the same time, the history of sustainable development points to the central importance of building effective inter-agency relationships.

In searching for new ways to expand land policy dialogue, it should be kept in mind that land policy is more than a technical issue. It is a challenging political process of negotiation, conflict resolution and managing the powerful vested interests that often stand in the way. Put otherwise, land policy development is about the way people and societies organize their political, economic and social systems to determine who has the right to use which parcels of land, for which purposes, under which conditions and for how long.

In this context, the poor need to be supported to represent their interests and to gain the power to prevent the non-poor and powerful rural elites from arranging things to their own advantage. To this end, the poor must have a direct role in setting policies affecting their access to natural resources, especially land. This requires a political climate in which leaders and government bureaucrats recognize that the long-term development of their economy is constrained by poverty and its link to the unequal distribution of land. Communities need to be aware of the realistic possibilities for change and the systemic obstacles to be overcome. Viable people's organizations need to emerge at the community level, accompanied by knowledge of the ways and means to achieve change. And, the poor need to be supported in their actions by credible and committed partners, both domestically and internationally.

The International Land Coalition is a global alliance of intergovernmental, governmental and civil-society organizations. The Coalition works together with the rural poor to increase their secure access to natural resources, especially land, and enable them to participate directly in policy and decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods at local, national, regional and international levels.

The need to expand land policy dialogue within and across countries is informed by the lessons learnt from past development efforts. If viewed widely in the context of sustainable development or more directly on issues of land, experience tells us that government-led development without the active support of civil society, and civil-society led development without the institutional and enabling support of government, have both failed. The record of official development assistance and lending institutions confirms that the active participation by communities in the planning and implementation of development policies and programs is an essential prerequisite to sustainable human development.

Revitalized alliances between governments and CSO's are clearly central to effective policy dialogue, especially if coupled with the moral and financial persuasion of the international community. Where it is possible to merge the interests of civil society, intergovernmental organizations and governments into a common platform or agenda for policy formulation and practical action programs, the synergistic effect can create innovative ways to address the resource rights and needs of the rural poor.

This was the aim of a two-year consultative process of Coalition stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels. The consultative process resulted in the program and document *Towards a Common Platform on Access to Land* (Annex 1) which was widely endorsed when it was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. *Towards a Common Platform on Access to Land* is a dynamic tool for strengthening global consensus on land issues. It is a living document and will be updated on a regular basis to incorporate the evolving experience, lessons, progress and expanding collaborative work being undertaken to foster improved property rights for the rural poor.

Towards a Common Platform on Access to Land provides a range of practical ways and means to facilitate alliances among sectors, assist governments in establishing land policies and services, strengthen rural people's organizations and work in partnership with civil-society and international organizations. The process of consultation among stakeholders was a major contributor to the role that the Coalition provides as a convener of diverse partners on land issues within and between communities and countries.

The interest in and support for the Common Platform as an iterative and ongoing vehicle for building alliances led to the call for other tools to help merge the efforts of stakeholders into joint efforts.

In response to this call, the Coalition developed its *LAND Partnership* (Annex 2) program.

Land Alliances for National Development, or *LAND Partnerships*, was launched by the Coalition at the WSSD. More than 70 representatives of governments and national and international CSO's and NGOs took part. On this occasion, the Governments of the Philippines and Indonesia declared their intention to launch *LAND Partnerships*. Since then, discussions have been opened with other governments which have approached the Coalition. And the Government of the Netherlands has become the first northern and donor partner. *LAND Partnerships* constitute a worldwide initiative led by the International Land Coalition to further country-level collaboration among state, civil-society, bilateral and international actors. This collaboration is needed to achieve participatory dialogue, improve policy formulation, establish joint action to achieve secure resource tenure for households with user rights, and improve the access to land by the landless and near-landless.

The first step in this collaborative process will involve the establishment of a neutral forum in each participating country. In guiding this process, the Coalition is hoping to use its experience in convening stakeholders across institutional borders to address a range of complex and often difficult land-management issues. *LAND Partnerships* will not be prescriptive, but will nurture arenas, for a, events, committees, land alliances or other structures that can provide a framework and mechanism for those with diverse, vested interests in land to find a common basis for progress. Through the establishment of *LAND Partnerships* within countries, the Coalition believes it is possible to find common ground, build alliances and resolve conflicts. *LAND Partnerships* can then move to the next stage in the development of country and community-specific solutions to the historic, social, economic and political challenges

involved in the improvement in land access by the poor. Specifically *LAND Partnerships* will:

- develop country-level, multi-stakeholder alliances, coalitions, commissions, or other convening mechanisms suited to country requirements in order to improve the security of the access to land and related factors of production by poor rural households and communities; and
- assist country *LAND Partnerships* to identify either locally, or through knowledge exchanged with other countries, the policy, programming and service-delivery systems that have created enabling conditions for the successful improvement in the access to land by the rural poor.

In summary, effective and sustainable land policies must be built on a consultative and cyclical process of formulation, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and renewal. This is essential to incorporate that adaptation that will be required to accommodate the changing needs and conditions of those affecting and those affected by land access, use and management policies and practices.

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**A COMMON PLATFORM ON
ACCESS TO LAND**

THE CATALYST TO REDUCE RURAL POVERTY
AND THE
INCENTIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The International Land Coalition

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A Common Platform on Access to Land

OVERVIEW

From the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), through the 1992 Earth Summit, to the World Food Summit of 1996, the call has repeatedly been made to help the poor gain secure access to land and to the productive factors of technology, credit, inputs and markets. In today's world, in which 75% of the poor live in rural communities, secure access to land provides the most realistic opportunity for poor households to improve their livelihoods, acquire assets to reduce their vulnerability and invest in the sustainable management of natural resources.

Without secure access to land and the means of production, the paradigm of daily survival compels the poor, due to circumstances beyond their control or influence, to live within short-term horizons that degrade resources and fuel a downward spiral of poverty.

The reasons for improving access to land are compelling – poverty reduction, natural resource and environmental management, reduced conflict over resources, slowed rural migration and urban growth, and increased aggregate food production. However, powerful vested interests stand in the way. Fortunately, possibilities for change are emerging as policy-makers come to understand the consequences of neglecting the rural poor and the effects of denying their access to productive resources. Moreover, without land and related assets, the rural poor will be marginalized further by the forces of globalization.

The 1995 Conference on Hunger and Poverty, sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, called for urgent action to empower the rural poor by increasing their access to productive assets, especially land, water and common-property resources, and by increasing their direct participation in decision-making. The conference created the International Land Coalition to revive support for pro-poor land policies on national and international agendas.

Support for improving access to land and security of tenure has been growing in recent years. The two-year consultative process that developed this COMMON PLATFORM ON ACCESS TO LAND has engaged stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels. The resulting broad based support offers new hope that progress can be made towards strengthening the property rights of the rural poor.

The success of the Common Platform will require strong partnerships with communities of the rural poor. Specifically, it provides the ways and means to:

- (a) facilitate alliances among sectors;
- (b) assist governments in establishing land policies and services;
- (c) strengthen rural peoples' organizations; and
- (d) work in partnership with civil society and international organizations.

The agenda for sustainable development is a call for all stakeholders to become allies with the landless by strengthening their resource opportunities and improving their capacity to develop sustainable livelihoods. The Common Platform will not only benefit the rural poor and the landless, but will also benefit societies at large, because the natural resource base will be managed so as to preserve its long-term productivity.

The Common Platform is a living document. It will be reissued at least once a year to reflect the evolving experience, lessons, progress and collaborative work being undertaken to improve property rights for the rural poor. The Common Platform will unite concerned organizations in a concerted effort to empower the rural poor through access to land and greater participation in the decisions affecting their livelihoods.

I. Introduction

1. The knowledge that land rights can break the cycle of poverty and the degradation of natural resources is not new. The commitment of governments at the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), indicated that this understanding was global. From the summits of the 1990s, including the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 and the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996, governments, international organizations and civil society have been regularly called upon to improve access by the rural poor to land and to the productive requirements of technology, credit, inputs and markets. Secure resource tenure is known to be a vital link between food security, sustainable resource management, peace and security, and the eradication of poverty. Sustainable development is not so much a technical challenge but a political process of negotiation, conflict resolution and managing vested interests. In other words, sustainable development is about the way people organize their political, economic and social systems to determine who has the right to use which resources, for which purposes, under which conditions, and for how long.

2. Implementing *Agenda 21: Report of the Secretary-General*¹ calls for new forms of collaboration among all stakeholders to build the political will, some would say courage, to face challenges such as removing national subsidies and tax provisions that favour large-scale farming or trade-distorting agricultural practices, which often have devastating effects on smallholders. The need is for all stakeholders to become allies of the landless, agriculture workers and smallholders by strengthening their political opportunities and capacity to participate effectively in national and local decisions on resource allocation, use and monitoring.

3. Since the founding of the International Land Coalition in 1995, and through the United Nations (UN) Commission on Sustainable Development, there has been a noteworthy increase in political commitment to the property rights of the poor. This commitment is moving up on international agendas – including broader participation in the Land Coalition, whose partners include civil society, farmers, women's organizations, indigenous peoples, peasant associations, farm workers, the European Commission, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), governments and bilateral organizations.

4. This COMMON PLATFORM ON ACCESS TO LAND has evolved through an extensive process of global consultation that was launched at the eighth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. It aims to stimulate and support public policies and country-level activities that improve access by the poor to land and productive requirements in order to improve their production and household incomes. Its global scope

¹ United Nations (UN) E/CN.17/2002/PC.2/7, 20 December 2001. *Agenda 21* was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992.

means that it can gather and disseminate knowledge and lessons learned from and to different countries and regions.

5. The Land Coalition reached out to many networks, governments and organizations during the preparatory committee meetings (PrepComs) for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The Common Platform will be presented to the summit, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August - 4 September 2002. Its success will flow from the active involvement of civil society, intergovernmental and international financial institutions and governments. Action by civil society, as it is manifest broadly in the work of communities and citizens at local, national and international levels, is particularly concerned with the asset needs of women, indigenous peoples, agriculture workers, landless families, smallholder farmers and pastoralists.

II. Background

6. At the Earth Summit in 1992, the United Nations concluded that:

The main tools of Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development are policy and agrarian reform, participation, income diversification, land conservation and improved management of inputs.²

7. From the UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm) in 1972 to establishing the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, international leaders and heads of state have searched for solutions to poverty and sustainable development under the auspices of the United Nations. Were these international campaigns combined into a unified international effort, the subsequent plan of action would call for increasing access by the poor to productive resources, closing the gap in the distribution of wealth, improving the participation of the poor in decision-making processes and reforming macroeconomic policies adversely affecting them.

8. More than one fifth of the world's population lives in extreme poverty. Some 1.2 billion people live on less than one United States dollar a day – many of them dependent on insecure and limited access to land for their subsistence. Seventy-five per cent of the poor, some 900 million people, live in rural areas. Women and women-headed households are the most vulnerable and represent a growing majority of the extremely poor. Discrimination, including lack of access to resources, is a primary cause of the "feminization of poverty". This is deeply worrying for the well-being of future generations (Box 1).

² UNCED (1992): *Agenda 21*, chapter 14.

Box 1: Providing Women with Secure Property Rights

Among the poor, women and women-headed households continue to constitute the majority of the extremely poor. In many contexts, major causes of women's impoverishment are continued discrimination and lack of access to education and to resources, especially land rights, i.e. equal property and inheritance rights. Whether married, widowed or single, women carry primary responsibility in many countries for household food security. It is essential to current and future family well-being that inheritance laws, practices and customs concerning divorce, and other factors limiting the livelihood opportunities of women be appropriately revised.

Women's groups call on governments to adopt legislation that guarantees women equal rights to own, manage, inherit and control land and to gain access to credit and appropriate technologies.³

9. Historically, rural people have been neglected. Vast numbers are landless or near landless. Their numbers are continuing to rise. They are being joined by groups displaced from more fertile areas as a consequence of land degradation, expropriation, demographic pressures, ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, privatization of common-property land, and the expansion of commercial agriculture, corporate logging and mining. Marginal areas are rapidly becoming ghettos of poverty characterized by reduced soil fertility and the rapid erosion of the natural resource base. More and more farmers and pastoralists are being deprived of land – their main source of production and the basis of their livelihoods. It is ironic that those who are the food producers, largely farm labourers, are among those most vulnerable to food insecurity. Accordingly, workers' rights to land should not be ignored in land reforms that seek to redistribute commercial property.

10. For the rural poor, secure access to land and fair employment practices in agriculture provide the most realistic opportunity to improve their livelihoods and develop assets that can reduce their vulnerability. Secure access to land and control over its management provide the most powerful incentive for the sustainable management of natural resources.⁴

III. Sustainable Development Means Access to Productive Resources

11. In their quest for food security, the rural poor often have little choice but to use their limited resources extensively. Their negligible natural and capital assets compel

³ Women's Environment and Development Organization (2001). Women and information for participation and decision-making in sustainable development in developing countries. New York.

⁴ Land rights may be distinguished from the more general term 'access' to land. The term 'rights' implies social and cultural enforceability by a legitimate authority that may be either a state institution or community. While land access includes rights issues, it may refer to informal or illegal forms of acquiring land such as open access or land invasions. It is argued that "land rights, as opposed to land access, imply a measure of security to an enforceable claim". Deere, C. and L. Magdalena (2001). *Empowering women: land and property rights in Latin America*. University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh. And more generally: Agarwal, B. (1994). *A field of one's own: gender and land rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

them to adopt survival strategies with short-term horizons. They become excluded from productive opportunities by ill-defined or non-existent property rights, limited access to financial services and markets, inadequate security against natural disasters, lack of education and training, and very little power in decision-making. Understandably, when property rights are lacking or insecure, farmers cannot be sure they will receive the benefits and thus lack incentive to make investments for the longer term. Instead of taking from and giving back to the soil, they drain its productive properties. While in a few places they may move deeper into the forest, most do not have the option to move. While this pattern is itself unsustainable, it must be understood in the context of poor people struggling to feed their families. Furthermore, concern for the environmental effect on forests should be seen in relation to the devastating effects of illegal logging, or companies and concessions that are not meeting sustainable forestry standards.

12. Arable land and fragile rangelands are deteriorating at alarming levels, putting current and future food security in jeopardy. Knowing that the feeding of growing populations requires increased production on current lands, it is critical to reverse this trend by providing incentives to the poor to invest in long-term productivity.

13. There are many interconnected features of access rights to land. While there are numerous technical elements, access to land is essentially a function of the way people organize their social, environmental, economic and political systems in relation to natural resources. Among these, the manner in which land is regulated, rights are assigned and conflicts are resolved predetermines the opportunities and incentives for the rural poor to:

- ensure household food security and earn income by the marketing of surpluses;
- employ sustainable land-management practices by investing in the long-term productivity of land;
- preserve the land and related assets during periods of agricultural stress;
- access financial services;
- accumulate capital and assets to invest in alternate livelihood options and reduce land fragmentation; and
- transfer assets to overcome intergenerational poverty.

14. Regarding investment incentives, a similar situation to that described for farmers exists with the landless and near-landless, who are often forced to rely heavily on common-property resources. They also have no incentive to invest in productivity improvements to this land, since others may reap the benefits. For the land poor, access may require redistribution. In other situations, insecure tenure, characterized as short-term use rights, may mean that even when a family has land, they may not invest in improvements. In each situation, the resulting land degradation and soil loss threaten the livelihoods of millions of people, as well as future food security, with implications for water resources and the conservation of biodiversity.

15. In decision III/11 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the international community recognized the need for an integrated, ecosystem approach to sustainable management of land and territories. Scientists and development practitioners acknowledge that the real causes of resource degradation are imbalances in power, wealth, knowledge and access to resources. They assert that restoration of degraded lands and protection of water, soils and forests require that the poor acquire secure access to land and to downstream services and productive requirements.

16. Today, rural decision-makers understand the relationships between poverty, land rights, conflict and the sustainable use of natural resources. Asset ownership by the poor is increasingly recognized as essential to sustained, broad based economic growth.

The expansion of this understanding has in recent years resulted in the gradual refocusing of national and international agendas on the revival of land reform and tenure security, and on the resource rights of fishermen and women and coastal communities, forest dwellers, pastoralists, agricultural workers, vulnerable women and indigenous peoples (Box 2).

Box 2: Indigenous Peoples – Land Beyond Production

For indigenous peoples, the right to land means more than productivity, food security and ensuring the material base of their identities. “The biggest challenge faced by indigenous peoples and communities in relation to sustainable development is to ensure territorial security: the legal recognition of our ownership and control over customary land and resources, and the sustainable utilization of our land and other renewable resources for our cultural, economic and physical health and well-being.”⁵ For indigenous peoples, land is directly linked to their spiritual and cultural identity, as exemplified in such expressions as “the land does not belong to us, we belong to the land”.

Indigenous peoples call on governments and international organizations to respect and promote their inherent rights and self-determination, especially their rights to lands, territories and resources as a basic precondition for strengthening participation, partnership and governance for sustainable development.

17. The economic, social and environmental functions of secure access to land not only provide the means for the rural poor to improve their livelihoods but can increase aggregate food supplies, raise rural employment and foster the uptake of more sustainable agricultural practices.

18. While secure resource rights cannot guarantee sustainable land management, the evidence is that when tenure is insecure there is greater incidence of human-induced desertification, expansion of rain fed cultivation onto unsuitable lands, continuous cultivation that depletes nutrients, excessive use of ground water, overgrazing, deforestation linked to fuelwood needs and expansion of the agricultural frontier.

IV. Sustainable Development Means Food Security

19. The debate on sustainable development and food security has often been framed as an argument between two competing options: increased access by landless groups and smallholders or increased food production and national food security. This is a false dichotomy. Providing access to the rural poor, feeding future populations and sustainable resource practices are not conflicting demands on land use.

20. As financially profitable as commercial farming may be, studies examining food security reveal that there is frequently an inverse relationship between farm size and productivity. In many contexts, large farms produce lower outputs of food per unit of land than do family-operated farms. Instead of intensifying production to meet the needs of growing populations, large farms tend to increase the pressure on fragile lands by displacing labour.

21. Smallholder farms use family labour. Large-scale farmers, finding labour to be their highest cost, revert to mechanization and higher levels of chemical inputs. Family

⁵ Tebtebba Foundation (2002). Indigenous peoples’ submissions to the 2nd PrepCom of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Philippines.

farming uses a higher level of labour per unit of land. This approach allows for a more ecological approach to agriculture, while also supporting greater intensification because each unit of land can be managed with more direct attention.

V. Sustainable Development Means Empowering the Rural Poor

22. A review of the development literature of the 1990s consistently describes the rural poor as lacking assets, being vulnerable to agricultural and economic shocks, lacking the capacity (training and knowledge) to participate in decision-making affecting their livelihoods, and suffering from an intergenerational sense of being powerless to change their condition. Despite this convincing evidence, few countries have undertaken major land-policy programmes for widespread land access and increased security for the rural poor. The political and economic difficulties have proved too formidable.

23. The potential of land reform and improved tenure arrangements to break the cycle of poverty and soil degradation has been understood for some time. The commitments made by governments at the 1979 WCARRD indicated that this understanding was global. Similarly, the Rome Declaration of the 1996 World Food Summit – adopted by acclamation by heads of state and governments – emphasized the links between providing access to land, overcoming hunger and achieving environmentally sustainable development.

24. The essential components of a plan of action have not changed significantly since WCARRD's *Peasant's Charter* of 1979 gave prominence to:

- access of poor rural people to land and water resources, agricultural inputs, extension services and farmer-centred research programmes;
- community participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of rural development programmes;
- adjustment of the structure and pattern of international trade and external investment to facilitate the implementation of poverty-oriented, rural development strategies; and
- the principle that growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and that it must be buttressed by equity and people's participation.

25. Even in countries committed to improving access and tenure security, implementation is often slow, delayed or manipulated by powerful interests, including existing big landowners and other interests that face the possibility of losing ownership of land and other natural resource assets. In many cases, resource rights provided for by law are not realized in practice. In others, the lack of beneficiary participation has limited the impact and sustainability of reform efforts.

26. Fortunately, the increasing efforts of civil society, the rise of democratic institutions and increased awareness of the political consequences of neglecting poverty are factors producing more favourable enabling conditions. There are also indications that economic liberalization and institutional reform may help reduce distortions that have historically favoured the powerful. For the rural poor, this may mean greater access to land, assuming that government policies and market conditions will eliminate the subsidies that have favoured large-scale farmers. Furthermore, international trade practices need to redress subsidy and support mechanisms that distort prices paid for locally produced food. Land taxes can provide a further incentive by making the practice of holding land for speculative purposes more costly.

27. However, international institutions with a mandate to foster development often lack strong links with communities and poor rural households. At the same time, civil-society organizations often lack access to decision-making and policy-setting processes that directly affect their livelihood systems. The dramatic rise in the number and nature of civil-society organizations reflects the growing call by communities to participate in setting policies and designing the programmes and services of governments. This call is driven by rising public concern for sustainable human development, which is known to be built upon a foundation of participation, social justice, equity and livelihood opportunities for the poor and the marginalized. Also, it is occurring in a context in which governments are struggling to serve their citizens in a global marketplace that is often beyond their legislative and regulatory control (Box 3).

Box 3: Sustainable Development Means Working Together

The history of sustainable development policies has shown that government-led development without the active support of civil society, and civil-society movements without the institutional and enabling support of government, have both failed. The record of official development assistance confirms that active participation by communities in the planning and implementation of development policies and programmes is an essential prerequisite to sustainable human development. These lessons point to the need for more effective alliances of governments and civil-society organizations, coupled with the moral and financial persuasion of the international community.

28. Land reform is essentially about changing inequitable access and tenure relationships. It aims to change the culture of excluding poor men and women from gaining access to land and the productive factors of credit, technology, markets and training. It seeks to make the poor active participants in the development of government policies and programmes to enable them to overcome their poverty.

29. Past difficulties have shifted attention towards markets as agents for land reform, commonly referred to as negotiated or market-assisted land reform.

30. The *Peasant's Charter* called upon governments in 1979 to moderate the economy to enable the poor to develop sustainable livelihoods. Today, over 20 years later, the rural poor remain highly vulnerable to agricultural shocks and economic changes in the market due to their lack of household assets. Instead of economic growth trickling down to the poor, they frequently become more and more indebted to the landed class.

31. While land markets are important, they are unlikely to provide the rural poor, especially the landless, with the ways and means to acquire land initially. Improving access by the poor requires enabling policies, programmes and financing by governments. Past experience suggests that governments may often choose to use compensation to acquire land for redistribution. However acquired, successful land reform will require that governments do not expect the poor to cover the full cost of compensation or otherwise pay market prices for the land. Unless land is provided under financial conditions manageable by the rural poor, the beneficiaries will accumulate debt and/or will not be able to make the land productive. In both situations, land reform will fail.

VI. Sustainable Development Means Different Approaches

32. Sustainable development is a process of determining who has the right to use which resources, for which purposes and for how long. Accordingly, different contexts will require different approaches. Today's global market place has strong tendencies towards formal systems, legal instruments, privatization and land markets. While these may be important elements in some contexts, they will be neither the preferred, socially acceptable nor most effective methods for long-term land management in other situations.

33. Secure land and resource rights can be provided by either informal or formal institutions. In each context there must be agreement on who owns the land, who has a secure interest in the land, how land transactions are negotiated, and how conflicts are to be resolved.

34. Community-defined ownership or user rights may perform these functions, whereas in other cases, formal property systems may be needed (Box 4). Formal systems may be necessary to reduce land disputes where population growth or demand for agricultural products leads to competitive pressures for the land, or where transactions with those outside the community are common. Titling programmes should only be considered where competitive pressures, disputes and conflicts mean that community land-tenure arrangements are ineffective. In many cases, titles have been used to formalize undocumented tenancy rights, including long-established, community-based systems. However, customary tenure systems have been highly resilient in many parts of the world, such as West Africa, providing innovative arrangements for the community management of natural resources. Indeed, some of these situations highlight that titling is not always a prerequisite for smallholders to invest in land and agricultural improvements.

Box 4: Community-Managed versus Open Land Markets

In parts of the world with strong, community-managed systems, people may be benefiting from tenure security without wishing to sell their land, or may not have the right to do so or may have limited rights such as only being able to sell to members of the community and not to outside parties. This may be the desired form of access, security and sustainability. In these situations open land markets may be resisted. It is important that communities retain their right to choose the most suitable way to protect their interests in their common natural resources.

35. Community-based approaches can offer a cheaper and effective alternative to formal institutions since buyers and sellers know each other, meaning that there is strong peer pressure to avoid socially disruptive property disputes. In these cases, the main source of demand for land is often from within the community; the community is close-knit; there is continuity of community leadership; and certificates of ownership, issued by the community, are respected by those in the same community.

36. In other contexts, more formal land institutions and property markets may be needed, which will likely involve land registries, titling services and land mapping. Three characteristics should be kept in mind where land administration systems are being established:

- clear definition and sound administration of property rights;
- simple mechanisms for identifying and transferring property rights; and
- thorough compilation of land titles and free access to this information.

37. Land parcels need to be defined by credible land surveys. Credibility is most assured if community representatives are directly involved in surveying, community mapping and boundary demarcation. Otherwise, the long and difficult process of resolving land disputes can undermine the fundamental aim of land registries.

38. In practice, any system for establishing land rights needs to be based on a simple method of identification and transfer. In some cases, occupancy rights have been converted into full titles based on an established minimum number of years as a cultivator. Lessons from mapping and documentation have shown the benefits of using a professional team, accompanied by the land user or owner, neighbours, and village chiefs, moving from field to field within a village area. Disputes are settled on the spot. When mapping and documentation of ownership and user rights are completed, the information is made publicly available so that claimants can openly register disagreements. If no conflicting claims are made during the prescribed waiting period, the tenure status is considered satisfied.

39. Where formal land markets are being established, secure property rights are the essential first step. While land markets may not be of interest to land users in some contexts, there are others in which they provide opportunities for the poor to widen their livelihood options. Poorly functioning land markets tend to lower land values, because effective demand is limited. Lower values reduce the incentive to invest in conservation because farmers cannot realize the benefits of investments if they sell the land. Low land values also reduce the value of the land as collateral (Box 5), since the lender cannot easily sell the land to recover lost credit. Thus credit tends to be more expensive when land markets function poorly.

Box 5: The Collateral Value of Secure Land Tenure

Secure land titles may improve access to credit and provide small-scale producers with the incentives to invest in sustainable land-management practices, thereby increasing household incomes and expanding the rural economy. While security of tenure is not a panacea for expanding rural finance in all areas, there is significant scope to combat poverty where collateral-based financing can be established. However, the potential to leverage credit against secure property rights needs further development in relation to distance from urban centres. Prevailing systems of formal bank lending have limited capacity, since lenders believe that foreclosure is unlikely to result in recovering their loans because there are few buyers for small, remote parcels of land. On the other hand, many lessons learned from the microcredit movement and the experience of land banks and credit cooperatives reveal ways to improve financial services to smallholders.

40. All too often, land-tenure arrangements, such as tenancy conditions, limit the ability of the poor to use land to accumulate capital assets. A secure tenure system can help the rural poor accumulate capital, on the basis of which they may gain additional livelihood options. These gains may depend on the collateral or sale value to provide incentives to invest in productivity improvements, while also offering the option to convert their assets, in whole or in part, into other income-earning opportunities.

41. The effectiveness of formal land systems depends on enforced legislative, regulatory and judicial systems that protect the land rights of the poor and provide for timely resolution of conflicts. This, in turn, requires:

- strengthening the capacity of community organizations and supporting their collective action within like-minded communities;

- fostering access by the poor to financial services, technology and markets; and
- supporting the processes through which the rural poor gain power in local and national governance.

42. Otherwise, the lessons from the past indicate that elites, outside traders, moneylenders and officials will expropriate the benefits over relatively short periods of time.

VII. Sustainable Development Means Institutional Action and Partnership

43. Where it is possible to merge the efforts of civil-society, intergovernmental and government organizations, the synergistic effects can impact rural livelihoods and the sustainability of the natural resources that are essential to combating rural poverty. The Common Platform suggests that the following actions may make a difference.

(a) Facilitating Alliances among Sectors

- Building broad based political and economic support for land-tenure reform, access to factor inputs and protecting the natural resource base;
- educating the public, especially in developed countries, about the fact that smallholder farms are potentially more productive and environmentally sustainable than large-scale commercial agriculture;
- uniting urban and rural peoples on action to counter the effects of out-migration on rural economies and its aggravating effects on urban poverty; and
- collecting and sharing lessons among communities on practical ways to overcome the problems of earlier agricultural-sector reforms.

(b) Assisting Governments in Establishing Land Policies and Services

- Mainstreaming land tenure in national policies and programmes based on international agreements endorsed by the nation states concerned;
- establishing independent and accountable land commissions with effective participation by potential beneficiaries;
- supporting community land-tenure systems rooted in clear assessments by community representatives of their equity and environmental suitability;
- establishing appropriate legal, regulatory and judicial frameworks for the registration and protection of people's resource rights;
- strengthening land registries, cadastral systems and survey methods;
- establishing land-tax systems, especially for underutilized land and land held for speculative purposes;
- reforming practices that subsidize internationally traded agricultural products and thus distort prices paid for locally produced foods;
- removing subsidies and tax provisions that provide distorting privileges to large-scale farmers;
- developing methods to increase financing for land reform and post-land-acquisition services, including land banks, land-for-taxes and land-for-debt schemes (Box 6);
- ensuring women's rights through land records, communal property systems, inheritance rights of widows and daughters, and representation in local decision-making bodies and land commissions (Box 1);
- redefining, according to international protocols, the political, economic and cultural relations between indigenous peoples and states regarding self-determination and self-government; lands, territories and resources, and rights to political participation;
- halting expansion of the agricultural frontier onto fragile lands;
- limiting the size of individual, family and corporate landholdings; and
- establishing benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and evaluating improvements in the access and tenure security of the rural poor.

Box 6: Debt for Agrarian Reform

The Jubilee Debt Campaign of the late 1990s aimed to link two central pillars of social justice. The history of jubilee years is that they are a time when the poor are to be freed of their debts and land is to be returned to the people. In view of the role of citizen movements in catalysing debt relief, it would be appropriate for the international community to incorporate access to land and security of tenure as activities eligible for Debt-for-Development funds. It may be said that these citizen movements were an impetus to the Debt Initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries.

(c) Strengthening Rural Peoples' Organizations

- Involving local communities in demarcating lands;
- protecting traditional forms of land and territorial tenure: *inter alia*, indigenous territories, common property and pastoral areas;
- ensuring direct roles for beneficiaries in land-valuation processes and in determining repayment terms;
- supporting education, organization and capacity-building of landless and near-landless people on their rights and the achievement of related legal provisions;
- strengthening rural, agricultural and peasant organizations, ensuring the inclusion of women-headed households (Box 1), widows, indigenous peoples, lower castes and other marginalized population groups;
- replicating, scaling up and mainstreaming innovative civil-society initiatives;
- organizing communities for access to credit, technology and marketing services; and
- protecting the knowledge systems of indigenous and nomadic peoples while strengthening their access to complementary resource management technologies.

(d) Working in Partnership with Civil Society and International Organizations

- Leveraging the moral persuasion and financing conditions of international organizations in order to place land and resource rights on national agendas;
- assisting governments and civil society in monitoring progress towards secure access to land and other productive assets in the context of the Millennium Development Goals as well as the WSSD; and
- developing ways and means of strengthening government systems to enable their compliance with international agreements.

VIII. Sustainable Development Means New Forms of Collaboration

44. The complexities of sustainable development and the challenges of land policy and improved access of the poor require robust partnerships of citizen, government and international organizations (Box 3). These coalitions can share and replicate successful sustainable development experiences and build common platforms for action among affected groups. Actions such as joint pilot projects can build practical ways of working together and result in better targeting of available resources to the poor.

45. At the 1995 Conference on Hunger and Poverty, sponsored by IFAD, a diverse group of stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations, citizen organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government officials, bilateral agencies and international financial institutions produced a consolidated analysis of the constraints on sustainable human development. They called for urgent action to empower the rural poor by increasing their access to productive assets, especially land, water and common-property resources, and by increasing their direct participation in decision-making processes affecting their livelihood systems.

46. The conference created the Land Coalition to revive support for pro-poor land policies on national and international agendas. The conference specified that building a coalition would require:

- a common understanding of the issues at hand;
- an understanding of the mandates and capacities of all partners;
- effective sharing of information and knowledge; and
- capacity to influence policy-makers.

47. The Land Coalition has been uniting multi-stakeholder concerns into a common agenda to empower the rural poor through improved access to productive assets. Since 1996, the Land Coalition has been building strategic and innovative land alliances from community to national, regional and international levels.

48. The initial membership of the Land Coalition comprised IFAD (the host organization), FAO, WFP, the World Bank, the European Commission and seven civil-society organizations. The number of partners has grown to include a much wider set of civil-society partners, including organizations of farmers, women, landless people, indigenous people, NGOs, and other community-based organizations in over 40 countries, along with additional international organizations and regional development banks.

49. The Common Platform on Access to Land will heighten attention to this issue and provide strong commitment for practical, country-level partnerships in the period following the WSSD. One of the many anticipated outcomes of the Common Platform will be to establish country-level, multi-stakeholder **Land Alliances for National Development**, to be known as LAND Partnerships, which will help build alliances within countries for action involving government, intergovernmental and civil-society organizations. For information on establishing a LAND Partnership, contact the Land Coalition.

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A PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE FOR
THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Land Alliances for National Development

Strengthening the Implementation of *Agenda 21*
through
Country-Level Partnerships for Land

The International Land Coalition

Secretariat: IFAD, Rome, Italy

Land Alliances for National Development

A WSSD PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) have provided an opportunity to merge past international agreements with a rising awareness of the need to forge multi-stakeholder alliances for action at the country level. A review of past land programmes and a vision for the future have converged into a strong call to provide the poor with secure access to land and the productive factors of technology, credit, inputs and markets. In today's world, in which 75% of the poor live in rural communities, secure access to land provides the most realistic opportunity for poor households to improve their livelihoods, acquire assets to reduce their vulnerability and invest in sustainable management of natural resources.

The reasons for improving access to land are compelling – poverty reduction, improved natural resource and environmental management, reduced conflict over resources, slowed rural migration and urban growth, and increased aggregate food production.

The WSSD preparatory processes and negotiations have provided clear signs that political support for access to land and security of tenure has reached new heights. Following the success of the Eighth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-8) of the United Nations in April 2000, the International Land Coalition⁶ launched a two-year consultative process that developed broad based support for ***A Common Platform on Access to Land***. The Common Platform has engaged multiple stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels. Throughout the consultative process, stakeholders called upon the Land Coalition to incorporate an initiative for practical partnerships, so that countries might establish multi-stakeholder, country-level initiatives that emulate the experience of the Coalition at the global level.

WORKING FOR PRACTICAL RESULTS AT WSSD

Land Alliances for National Development, or **LAND Partnerships** as they have become known, constitute a worldwide initiative led by the Land Coalition to further country-level collaboration between state, civil-society, bilateral and international actors. This collaboration is needed to achieve participatory dialogue; improve policy formulation; establish joint action to secure resource tenure for households with user rights; and increase access to land by the landless and near-landless.

⁶ At the 1995 Conference on Hunger and Poverty, sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a diverse group of stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations, citizen organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government officials, bilateral agencies and international financial institutions called for urgent action to empower the rural poor by increasing their access to productive assets, especially land, water and common-property resources, and by increasing their direct participation in decision-making processes affecting their livelihood systems. Together they established the Land Coalition as a mechanism to build strategic and innovative land alliances from community to national, regional and international levels. The initial membership of the Land Coalition comprised the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IFAD, the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank, the European Commission and seven civil-society organizations. The number of partners has grown to include a much wider set of civil-society partners, including organizations of farmers, women, landless people, indigenous peoples, NGOs, and other community-based organizations in over 40 countries, along with additional international organizations and regional development banks.

The first step in this collaborative process will involve the establishment of a neutral forum in each country. In guiding this process, the Land Coalition is hoping to use its experience in convening stakeholders across institutional borders on a range of complex and often difficult land-management issues. These forums will constitute the foundation of national LAND Partnerships and will establish multi-stakeholder alliances or strengthen existing ones within participating countries. LAND Partnerships will not be prescriptive, but will nurture arenas, forums, events, committees, land alliances or other structures as frameworks within which diverse, vested interests in land can find a common basis for progress. The Land Coalition's experience is that it is possible to find common ground, build alliances and resolve conflicts within countries through LAND Partnerships. These partnerships can then move to the next stage of developing both country- and community-specific solutions to resolve historic social, economic and political challenges in improving land access by the poor.

To accomplish this goal, the Land Coalition has brought together a diverse group of partners. Beginning with a solid foundation of intergovernmental and multilateral institutions, its larger partners represent some of the most established and knowledgeable agents of development. They can provide substantial resources, expertise and experience, along with a growing commitment to further land reform as a means to eradicate poverty. Other Coalition partners complement these institutional strengths with the voice of the people. Many groups concerned with access to resources, from international NGOs to community-based organizations, are already part of the Coalition's effort to increase dialogue. This effort is underway in 40 countries, with the result that the Land Coalition is now in a unique position to facilitate a dialogue on land that can bridge the gap between macro and micro policy-making. Such an approach helps countries undertake a transparent and neutral assessment of how to improve access to land by the poor in ways that contribute to national economic development and sustainable natural resource management.

BUILDING ON SUCCESSFUL LAND EFFORTS

The effectiveness of the Land Coalition is directly related to the capacity of its network to cross institutional and governmental borders and cultures. In order to build alliances and test consensus levels, the Coalition constructed its network through a number of conferences on access to resources. In an effort to continue to build consensus, it actively contributed to key international events devoted to land tenure following CSD-8. These events included the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) in Tagaytay City, The Philippines, in 2000; the international conference Access to Land – Innovative Agrarian Reforms for Sustainability and Poverty Reduction in 2001 in Bonn, Germany; the Consultative Meeting on Land Policy Issues in Washington, D.C., United States; four regional land-policy workshops organized by the World Bank in Cambodia, Hungary, Mexico and Uganda early in 2002; and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) seminar on land reform in Brazil in March 2002. To these can be added numerous civil-society meetings on land policy convened by both the Coalition and its numerous partners in their regions. All of these events have provided insight into the growing concern for and political interest in improving access of the poor to productive assets. These goals, objectives and related commitments can contribute to the achievement of *Agenda 21*, as well as to the realization of the goals and objectives of the series of major United Nations summits that took place during the 1990s (e.g. Beijing, Cairo, Copenhagen, Istanbul, Rome and Vienna). All of these summits cited secure access to resources as a recurring development requirement – a theme echoed by the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.

The challenge of obtaining a heightened level of support for the resource rights of the rural poor presents, as a starting point, the need to determine the substance and scope upon which broad based consensus can be achieved. Building a multi-stakeholder alliance of various networks requires the convening strength of a unified platform for action. The outcomes of the aforementioned consultations, events, conferences, advocacy campaigns and intergovernmental negotiations contain the ingredients for such a platform. These ingredients have been articulated in the Common Platform on Access to Land. The Common Platform provides the contextual analysis and policy considerations for achieving sustainable development as called for by the WSSD and thus the inspiration for launching LAND Partnerships at the summit. These partnerships are a means of linking government commitments to action.

The essential outcome from WSSD will be to transform the framework for *A Common Platform on Access to Land* into actions that will empower poor communities to develop sustainable livelihoods based on the sustainable use of their natural resources. LAND Partnerships can be the mechanism to support countries in moving from ideas to action.

BENEFITS OF A LAND PARTNERSHIP IN YOUR COUNTRY

The lessons from previous policies and programmes for improving access to land by the poor have taught us that citizen movements lacking institutional and public support and government-led programmes lacking the support of citizen organizations have both failed. What is needed is revitalized alliances of governments and civil-society organizations, coupled with coherent support from the international and bilateral community.

LAND Partnerships are a means to replicate and scale up the best practices of some communities for the benefit of others and as a basis for national policy consideration. More importantly, they are an opportunity for all parties involved to move from their individual roles into collective ones, where new opportunities can be created and commitments undertaken. LAND Partnerships will support government commitments and the political requirements of the outcome of the WSSD in order to reach targets and achieve concrete results in respect of secure land access and sustainable resource management.

In the 40 plus countries in which it has active programmes, the Land Coalition has been testing interest in LAND Partnerships with potential partners from other parts of the world so as to launch partnerships in a geographically balanced range of pilot countries. Pilot LAND Partnerships are expected to stimulate expansion into surrounding countries. Initiation of LAND Partnerships will be voluntary, and will be country-driven. The role of the Land Coalition Secretariat will be to support local implementation capacity by building upon existing and emerging initiatives and activities. It seeks to scale up such initiatives by facilitating and supporting coordination, collaboration and the sharing of lessons learned with LAND Partnerships in other countries and to add value by fostering stakeholder forums.

Specifically, LAND Partnerships will:

- develop country-level, multi-stakeholder alliances/coalitions/commissions or other convening mechanisms suited to country requirements. These structures will support the implementation of WSSD outcomes regarding security of access to land and related productive factors by poor rural households and communities; and

- assist country LAND Partnerships in identifying, either locally or from knowledge exchanges with other countries, the policy, programming and service-delivery systems that have created conditions successful in improving access to land by the rural poor.

Although it is clear that successful outcomes will depend on the emergence of country-specific solutions, it is likely that a number of common areas of focus and activity will emerge. These may include:

- assessing and adjusting legislative, regulatory and judicial frameworks as needed, taking into consideration current circumstances affecting access of the rural poor to land;
- developing action programmes to obtain technical expertise, and capacity-building at all levels – from government ministries through local authorities to communities;
- establishing independent, representative land commissions or alternate forums to ensure equity, transparency and accountability;
- determining appropriate mechanisms for, among others, demarcating land boundaries and territories, resolving conflicts, managing common property, financing land distribution and access, and fostering post-land-reform requirements (credit, technology, market access, etc).

The Land Coalition will provide assistance in mobilizing resources for LAND Partnerships. Currently, the Coalition is working with its intergovernmental partners, including FAO, IDB, IFAD, the World Bank, WFP, the European Commission and a number of bilateral donors.

Moreover, the Community Empowerment Facility, an existing programme of the Land Coalition based on a small-grants system, can support LAND Partnerships in areas of empowerment:

- strengthening the negotiating ability of the poor to achieve secure access to land, including common property, water and associated support services;
- facilitating community participation in policy dialogue and local governance;
- building on traditional organizations and practices;
- strengthening rural peoples' organizations and building alliances;
- supporting government land institutions in partnership with target communities;
- facilitating conflict-resolution processes;
- replicating and scaling up agrarian reform models; and
- disseminating best practices and lessons learned.

In addition to coordinating LAND Partnerships, the Land Coalition will strive to support LAND networks in overcoming logistical, political, and informational difficulties. It will also help countries involved in LAND reduce their learning curves by sharing lessons learned. One of the comparative advantages of the Land Coalition is its Agrarian Reform Network (ARnet). ARnet supports and helps build national, regional and global networks to exchange information on land issues, reform and management by gathering promising examples and case studies from the work of civil society.

The Land Coalition collaborates with several programmes that will add strength to LAND Partnerships. Through the Global Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the Coalition can cofinance activities with the International NGO Network on Desertification (RIOD) and the Community Exchange and Training Programme (CETP) to

achieve greater impact in areas prone to land degradation. It will also work closely with FAO's Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) initiative. SARD aims to support innovation, pilot testing and replication of new technologies, good practices, stakeholder consultations, participatory approaches and strategic alliances. This collaboration will increase the resources available for undertaking LAND Partnerships. The Coalition will work with the Commission on Sustainable Development to ensure that the LAND initiative contributes to international, regional and national compliance and governance of sustainable development programmes at all levels. Collectively, these alliances will add momentum to improving the well-being of the rural poor through their access to resources – both through direct programmes and by furthering the openness upon which LAND Partnerships are based.

It is also foreseen that individual country LAND Partnerships will be united regionally and globally through a continual expansion and strengthening of Land Coalition country partners. This empowering approach will accelerate the path of demand-driven development. For instance, the history of the Coalition has shown that since ICARRD (Tagaytay City, December 2000), the Land Coalition and its ARnet partners throughout Asia have continuously identified key knowledge areas and themes from their ever-changing experiences and activities. As a result, the organizations involved develop common indicators; linkages on cross-sectoral issues; and common principles and frameworks for approaches, leadership training, best practices, international and national advocacy initiatives and strategies. These dynamic discoveries are the basis for scaling up activities, an interactive relationship that the Land Coalition is well positioned to support.

As with the Land Coalition itself, a framework for monitoring the progress of LAND will be agreed upon by participating partners at the country level. The Coalition will play a coordinating role for monitoring at regional and international levels. But the Land Coalition will essentially serve in a support capacity rather than in one of command.

LAND PARTNERSHIPS – FROM RHETORIC TO RESULTS

The need for new forms of collaboration was clearly stated by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his reflections on the ingredients for a successful World Summit on Sustainable Development⁷. Yet as the world debates sustainable development and negotiates the language of a plan of action to revive *Agenda 21*, there remains a serious deficit in the dialogue taking place among stakeholders regarding both the policy and programme requirements to bring about secure access to resources. Numerous multilateral organizations have expressed a desire for more input from civil society. Similarly, both governments and the landless poor throughout the developing world continue to voice their desire to contribute more actively to the planning of sustainable development in their countries and communities. But this requires a new arena for dialogue. All parties concerned can benefit from robust, cross-sectoral discussion and a role in collective decision-making. The Land Coalition, through its LAND initiative, is answering the call and accepting responsibility to help countries move from ideas about land to action – to improve secure access and ensure sustainable land management for current and future generations.

To learn more about establishing a LAND Partnership in your country, contact the Land Coalition.

⁷ United Nations, 14 May 2002. Towards a Sustainable Future, American Museum of Natural History annual environment lecture.