



INTERNATIONAL LAND COALITION

SECURE ACCESS TO LAND

A Basic Component of an Integrated Approach to Rural Development

The High-Level Segment of ECOSOC

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International Land Coalition

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PREFACE

In many countries, the issue of improving secure access by the poor to land touches on fundamental inequalities in rural communities. However, as difficult as it may be, there is a growing body of knowledge, international opinion and global agreements that secure access to land by the rural poor is fundamental to reducing rural poverty, stimulating rural economic growth and protecting the natural resource base on which current and future generations depend.

Where there have been improvements in the levels of secure access to land and related productive factors there have been:

- Reduced levels of food insecurity;
- Income gains;
- Safety net effects;
- Investment effects;
- Income distribution effects stimulating wider economic growth;
- Reduced levels of conflict;
- Physical quality of life effects measurable by nutrition levels, access to sanitation, educational participation of children; and,
- Adoption of more sustainable resource practices.

Where resource rights and security of access have been addressed there has also been a break with feudal systems or reduction in the exploitive working conditions of agricultural workers. Furthermore, secure access provides essential non-economic benefits that are essential to long term well-being including a sense of identity and hope for the future.

Studies, most recently reported in the World Bank's Policy Research Report "Land Policy for Growth and Poverty Reduction", cite that:

- democracy has usually occurred much later in countries dominated by large landlords compared to those that relied on smallholder production;
- high land concentrations reduce the incentives for the provision of public goods and services;
- the total surplus production to be derived from land and associated public goods tends to increase with greater equality in the asset distribution;
- communities with more egalitarian land access are characterised by higher levels of collective action;
- public provision of property rights prevent resource dissipation by providing both security (less resources required to protect rights) and incentives to invest in its productive potential;
- women's control over assets affects households spending patterns; and,
- attention to women's land rights is particularly warranted where women are the main cultivators and where adult mortality is high, especially due to HIV/AIDS.

Secure access to natural resources, especially land, is central and cross-cutting to overcoming rural poverty. Land issues must be linked to related access issues (water, financial services, technology, capacity building, markets) and addressed within the local territorial realities and relationships wherein decisions and changes must occur.

WHY LAND?

More than one fifth of the world's population lives in extreme poverty. Seventy-five per cent of these people – some 900 million – live in rural areas. The majority of them are dependent on land for their subsistence. In most cases, their access to land and related resources is greatly limited and very insecure. With few, if any, assets, the rural poor frequently suffer food shortages, have little command over their livelihoods and are among the first to suffer the effects of low rainfall, declines in food production resulting from environmental degradation, and increases in prices for agricultural inputs and basic household commodities. For most of the rural poor, secure access to land is fundamental to overcoming poverty.

Historically, rural people have been neglected. Vast numbers are landless or near-landless, and the numbers are continuing to rise. They are being joined by groups displaced from more fertile areas as a consequence of land degradation, the unwanted loss of their land through expropriation or privatization, demographic pressures, conflicts, natural disasters and the expansion of large-scale commercial farming, corporate logging and mining. The marginal areas left available to the poor are rapidly becoming ghettos where degraded soils and the erosion of the natural resources are making subsistence a daily challenge and future opportunities to improve family well-being increasingly impossible. More and more farmers, woman-headed households, pastoralists and indigenous peoples are being deprived of land: their main source of household food production and the basis of their livelihoods, future and well-being. It is ironic that those who are the food producers are among those most vulnerable to food insecurity. They have no assurance that they will have the right to use the land in the future, nor that they will work under fair conditions as agricultural laborers. For rural people who rely on agriculture, secure access to natural resources, especially land, holds the most promise for the accumulation of family assets: assets with which they can produce food to feed their families, earn income from the sale of surpluses, produce fodder for livestock and use as collateral to obtain credit.

Within the sub-groupings of the rural poor, women and their right to own and inherit land is of great importance. Women are the guardians of household food security, a growing majority among smallholders and increasingly the heads of households as a consequence of male migration to the cities or losses due to HIV/AIDS.

The reasons for improving the access by poor people to land are compelling: poverty reduction, better natural resource and environmental management, reduced conflict over resources, the effort to slow rural migration and urban growth, and increased aggregate food production. Without secure access to land and the complementary means of production, the rural poor are obliged to adopt survival strategies with short-time horizons. Often due to circumstances beyond their control or influence, these strategies frequently end up degrading resources and fuelling a downward spiral of poverty. Understandably, when property rights are lacking or insecure, the poor cannot be sure they will receive the benefits, and they thereby lack the incentives to make investments for the longer term. After all, why would anyone, especially a poor person, take the risk to invest in land, such as by planting trees to preserve the soil from erosion, if there is no guarantee that he or she will be able to use that same piece of land in the future?

In the rural areas in most developing countries, land is not only the primary means for the generation of a livelihood, but also the main vehicle for the accumulation of capital and the transfer of capital between generations. What's more, the issue of land cuts across the issue of development, and the manner by which land is regulated, rights assigned and conflicts resolved has a profound effect on the daily lives and future prospects of the rural poor, including through:

- the ability of households to produce for their subsistence and to generate income by producing marketable surpluses;
- the social and economic status of rural families, including their collective identity;
- the incentives for the rural poor to exert their own effort, to make investments and to sustain the natural resource base;
- the opportunity for the poor to access financial services; and
- the capacity of families to build reserves to protect their assets during periods of agricultural stress.

Despite these convincing reasons, few countries have undertaken major agrarian reform measures. In many countries, the political and economic difficulties associated with land reform have been formidable since land tenure and property rights touch on the fundamental inequities in rural societies.

COMMITMENTS TO RESOURCE RIGHTS ARE NOT NEW

The potential for resource rights to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to sustainable livelihood strategies has resurfaced regularly over the past 30 years.

The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development declared in 1979 that "the rural poor must be given access to land and water resources, agricultural inputs and services, extension and research facilities; they must be permitted to participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of rural development programmes; the structure and pattern of international trade and external investment must be adjusted to facilitate the implementation of poverty-oriented rural development strategies. Growth is necessary but not sufficient; it must be buttressed by equity and, above all, by people's participation."

More recently the direct link between resource rights, particularly access to land, overcoming hunger and poverty was emphasised by: the IFAD sponsored Conference on Hunger and Poverty in 1995 which founded the International Land Coalition; the 1996 World Food Summit and its five year review in 2002; and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development last year.

The conclusions of these and the other Summits is that one of the most frequent causes of poverty is unequal access to natural resources. The Summits describe the vulnerability of the poor in terms of: lacking productive family assets; the devastating effects of agriculture and economic shocks; lacking the capacity (training, knowledge and opportunity) to participate in decision-making affecting their livelihoods; being adversely affected by macro-economic policies that adversely affect their rights and opportunities; and, suffering from an inter-generational sense of being powerless to change their condition.

COMPELLING ARGUMENTS ARE NOT ENOUGH

In spite of the social, economic, environmental and political arguments, efforts to implement pro-poor policies are often met with substantive obstacles. Even in countries committed to improving access to land and security of tenure, implementation is often slow, delayed or manipulated by the power of vested interests and landed classes.

Today there is a renewed emphasis on rural poverty. The emphasis is on local participation, building social capital and linking the rural poor to dynamic sectors of the economy. Participation allows the poor a voice, and through a transfer of responsibility gives them the power to discover and determine ways to improve their lives. Empowering the poor through secure access to resources is the foundation of rural poverty alleviation.

Policies and implementation strategies feature resource rights and institutions. The focus is on the organizations (community-based organisations, rural workers, women's groups, indigenous peoples, fisher folk, producer associations) that mediate the access of the poor to assets, financial services, technologies and markets. And, on the rules (laws, customs and administrative practices) that determine whether the poor benefit from such access. The poor's chance to influence rules, and to help control organizations, depends on their power and solidarity. These, in turn, depend on their knowledge, access and, perhaps above all, whether alternative courses of action are open to them.

PRO-POOR INSTITUTIONS ARE CENTRAL

The paradox is that, while the goal is to foster institutional change to help the poor acquire land and other assets, institutions, including the state, tend to be controlled by the powerful non-poor. Often, those who control one institution also control others. For instance, even after land redistribution, the large farmer may continue to have better access than the ex-landless labourer to production, credit, information and marketing networks, and the capacity to diffuse and insure against risk.

While these relationships are complex and therefore do not lend themselves to formulas, the use of a mathematical analogy can illustrate the interactive elements of any strategy for resource reform.

<p>Resource Reform = <u>Secure Access and Tenure + Support Services + Participation</u> Resistance from Vested Interests and the Landed Class</p>
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Can the poor and weak use, transform and benefit from those institutions, which were initially controlled by the rich and powerful and run mainly in their interest? What alternative or countervailing institutions need to be established or strengthened to advance and protect the access needs of the poor to productive resources and related upstream and downstream services.

The poor need to be empowered to represent and protect their interests. They must be able to restrain the non-poor and rural elites from arranging things to their own advantage. For this purpose, the poor must have a direct role in setting policies affecting access to natural resources and related factor markets. In some cases, the

rural poor may benefit by uniting with the urban poor since out-migration from rural communities often has negative effects on the rural economy while simultaneously aggravating urban poverty.

In most cases, progress depends on whether the poor use their resources and power jointly, or are fragmented by distance, economic groupings, caste, ethnic group or gender. It also matters whether the poor can afford the time, costs and risks of political activism. They need support and solidarity of various forms along with the moral authority of credible partners, both nationally and internationally.

Institutions may often persist, but they are not immutable. Channelling appropriate resources such as land, education, and technology to raise the productivity of assets, and markets to improve sales and purchases for and from asset use, improve the options that over time may also help the rural poor to alter institutions for their sustained benefit. For instance, by changing the political structure in the village, resource redistribution gives more voice to the poor and induces them to get involved in local institutions and management of the local commons. It helps in overcoming the inter-generational sense of helplessness, which is itself a problem that needs specific attention. Communities need to be awakened to the realistic possibilities for change; aware of the systemic obstacles to be overcome; organised into viable people's organisations; educated to ways and means to achieve change; and, supported in their actions with the confidence of being in solidarity with others.

Fortunately, new opportunities are emerging that can create more favourable enabling conditions. These include the efforts of civil society, the rise of democratic institutions and increased political awareness of the consequences of continuing to neglect rural populations.

ELEMENTS OF A PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Within both civil-society organisations and intergovernmental and international financial institutions there is a growing number of influential persons who share a common interest in building broad-based political and economic support for land tenure reform, access to factor inputs and protecting the natural resources base. These are the key actors who need to be engaged in ongoing dialogue in order to influence the internal policies and practises of these institutions and governments. This is an important group of stakeholders to engage in evaluating classical and emerging experiences and concepts for improving land access by the rural poor, particularly the landless. This should include examining models postulated on land markets as well as methods arising from civil society experiences in land reform. This is a group that can also have an influence on the incorporation of civil society experiences into government land policies and practises.

It is not at all uncommon to find that advocacy campaigns for land reform confront a long entrenched view that large-scale, commercial agriculture is more productive and that reform will only fragment land into unproductive, small units. There is a need to educate decision makers to the benefits that can accrue from smallholder agriculture. The benefits, among others, can include increased aggregate food production; higher levels of employment for farm and family labour; improved practices of soil, water and resource management and multiplier effects in both the rural and urban economy.

The environment, global warming, global conflicts and civil wars, migrants and refugees are among those issues that are increasingly common preoccupations of

citizens of every country. Access to land and tenure security has a direct bearing on each of these issues. These issues increasingly touch on the self-interests of all countries and thereby form a basis for building a global citizens movement for resource rights.

The common ground that unites stakeholders to the cause of resource rights all too quickly fades as the modalities for implementation are debated. There is the need to strengthen multi-stakeholder coalitions and systems to collect, analyse and share knowledge of the new and innovative approaches to land reform in order to demonstrate the capacity to overcome the constraints experienced in earlier reform models. It is important to test the viability of scaling up the experiences of civil society into national initiatives. There is also need to test emerging land tenure markets (negotiated/market assisted, sharecropping, leasing, corporate farming) to understand the features of these forms of land use that can provide the opportunity for the poor to gain and maintain access to land and related assets.

For some time, there has been a recognised need to foster new forms of partnership and more open spaces for dialogue between civil society, governments and international organisations. The need is for information sharing, to promote dialogue among affected groups and to contribute to consensus building. There is also the need for joint pilot projects that can build new ways of work. The goal of opening more space for dialogue among stakeholders is greater coherence in targeting resources to the location specific obstacles confronting the poor.

Toward this need, the International Land Coalition aims to build strategic and innovative alliances between diverse development organisations giving particular emphasis to the role of civil society in gaining access to land and water and related productive assets and by increasing their direct participation in decision-making from the local to the international level.

WHAT CAN CIVIL SOCIETY DO?

Throughout the world, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are actively and successfully undertaking activities that are helping to increase the rural poor's access to land and other natural resources. The civil-society work on land issues spans a broad range of areas, from advocacy and human rights to training on the post-land-reform processes needed so that newly obtained resources become productive. Examples of CSO work include:

- supporting the education, organization and capacity-building of landless and near-landless people, smallholders and farm workers on their rights and on ways to achieve related legal provisions;
- involving local communities in the demarcation of lands;
- protecting of traditional forms of land and territorial tenure, including indigenous territories, common property and pastoralist areas;
- ensuring direct roles for beneficiaries in land-valuation processes and in determining terms of acquisition and financing;
- strengthening rural, agriculture and peasant organizations and ensuring they include woman-headed households, widows, indigenous peoples, lower castes and other marginalized population groups;
- replicating, up-scaling and mainstreaming of innovative civil-society initiatives;
- organizing communities so they can collectively access credit, technology and marketing services;

- reducing leakage by becoming channels for the direct delivery of government services to the rural poor;
- protecting the knowledge systems of indigenous and nomadic peoples, while strengthening the access of these peoples to complementary resource management technologies;
- joining with governments to design land laws and regulations in the agricultural sector;
- assisting communities so that they can purchase land at fair prices and gain access to land funds;
- leveraging the moral persuasion and financial conditionality of international organisations in order to place land and resource rights on national agendas.
- educating and enhancing the capacity of communities to defend their interests with respect to commercial and transnational corporations; and,
- undertaking comparative regional analyses of land access issues so that learning among countries and communities is improved.

However, information on CSO and community activities is often not documented. As a result, opportunities for replicating successes are lost and critical information is not put before policy-makers. Civil society's direct experience generates knowledge that can validate or challenge traditional assumptions about land issues. The constraints experienced by communities and the lessons they learn are fundamental in the discovery of practical ways forward and in avoiding unnecessary ideological debates. However, it must also be understood that the local-level experiences of civil society must demonstrate a national viability before they will be considered as a basis for higher level policy development. The replication and up-scaling of civil-society experiences must become visible before politicians will confront the powerful vested interests that stand in the way of land reform.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO?

Governments that have risen to the challenges of agrarian reform often need assistance from the international community. Reluctant governments, on the other hand, need to receive strong encouragement to act on the same subjects. Among others, these include:

- establishing appropriate legal, regulatory and judicial frameworks that can register and protect people's resource rights;
- implementing land literacy programmes to inform the population of their rights and how they can be exercised;
- ratifying and implementing international conventions on people's rights to resources;
- establishing independent and accountable Land Commissions with adequate participation by potential beneficiaries;
- reducing leakage and improve service delivery by using rural peoples' organisations to deliver government support services; and,
- 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;
- reform macro-economic policies that privilege large-scale farmers;
- develop methods to increase financing for land reform and post-land acquisition services including land banks, land for debt schemes and land for taxes; and,
- develop human capital by investing in rural schools, health facilities and extension services;

While commitments to the resource rights of the rural poor are not new, there is an emerging consensus on the underlying contribution of resource right to durable solutions to poverty, food security, conflict resolution and the environmentally sustainable management of the world's eco-systems. This understanding of the importance of secure access to land and legally enforceable tenure is new. It provides the basis to forge a global movement that crosses sectors in ways that were previously not envisioned.

WORKING TOGETHER WORKS

The International Land Coalition encourages joint actions, pilot initiatives and action research. It supports the sharing of knowledge on best practices, the strengthening of national networks of rural peoples, and the strengthening of the capacity of government to foster a wider space for dialogue with civil society and external parties. The Coalition also works internationally to elaborate a common platform on land issues. Finally, the Coalition supports innovative projects in order to identify practical approaches suited to country-level circumstances and taking into account historic experiences and obstacles. The Coalition is a convening mechanism for greater collaboration through partnerships that respect diversity of opinion and promote open dialogue, for example through its **Land Alliances for National Development (LAND)** Partnerships, an outcome of the WSSD, in the interest of the resource needs and rights of the rural poor.

MISSION STATEMENT

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.

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