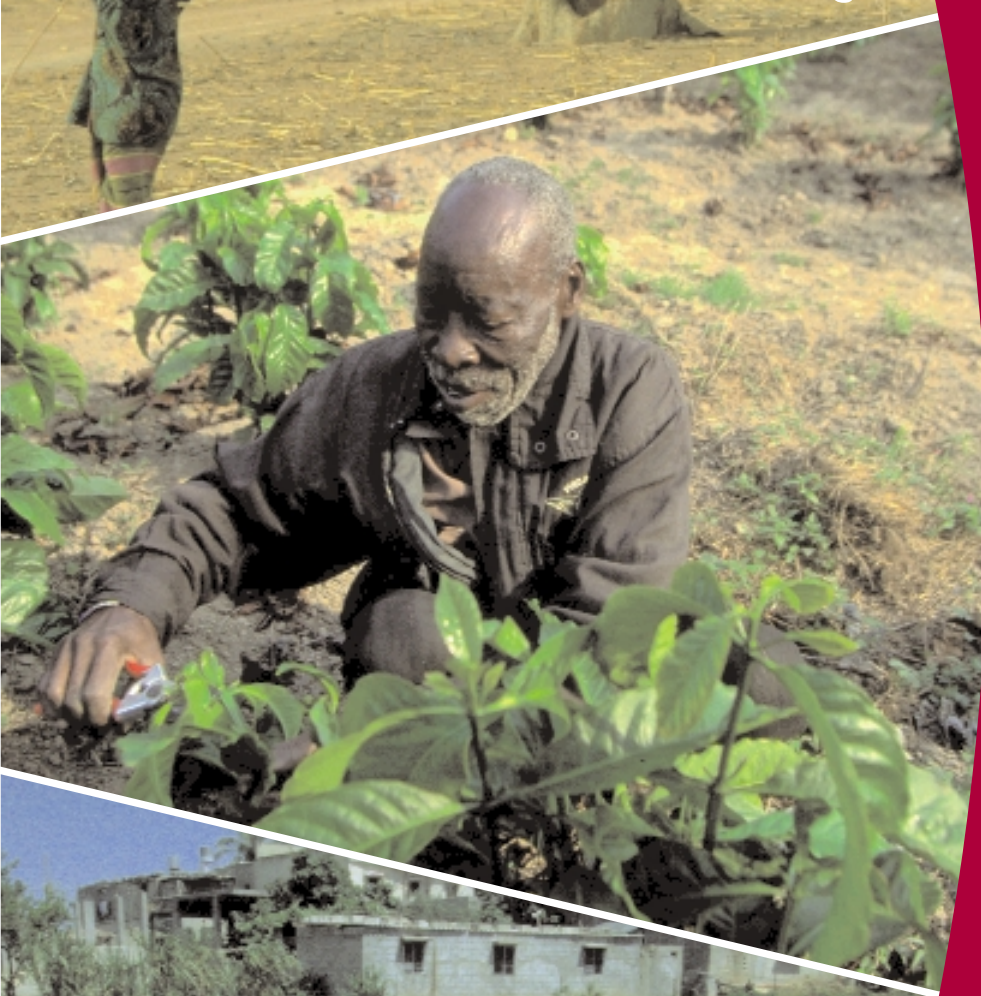


The Land Poor

Essential Partners for the Sustainable
Management of Land Resources



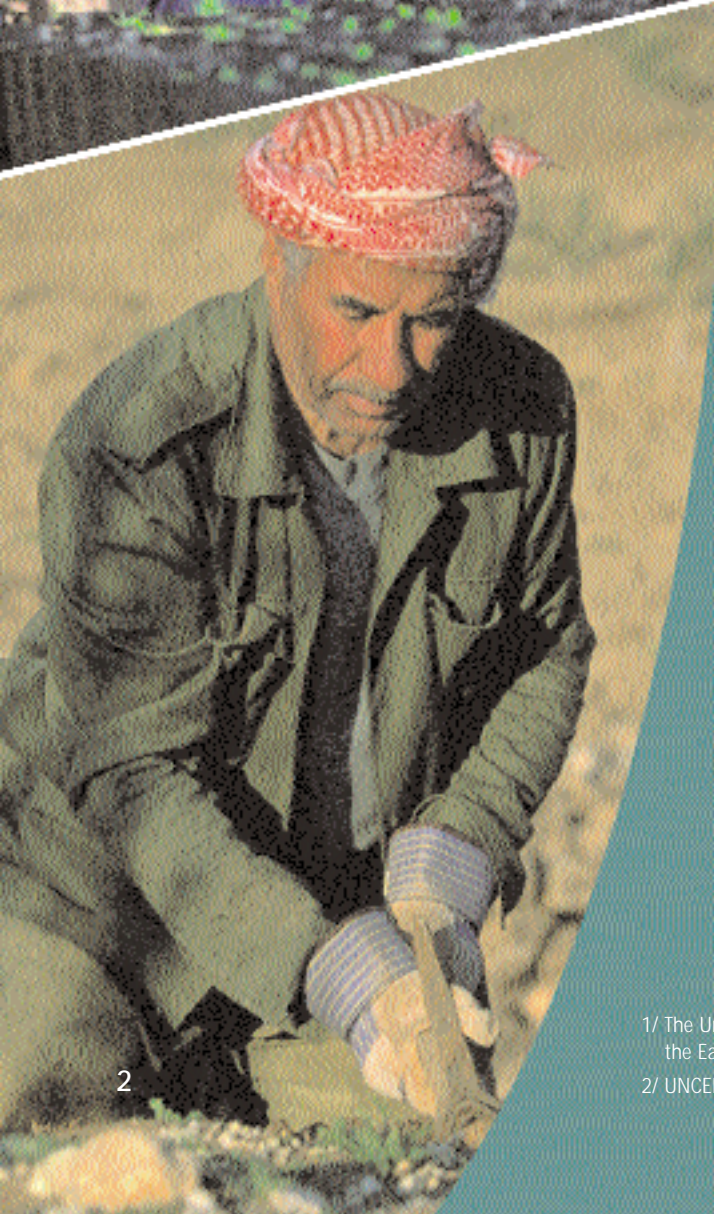
THE POPULAR COALITION
TO ERADICATE HUNGER AND POVERTY

A global consortium of intergovernmental and civil-society organizations governed by seven regional civil-society organizations and five intergovernmental organizations – IFAD, FAO, WFP, the European Commission and the World Bank



At its 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)^{1/}, the United Nations concluded:

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/}.



1/ The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development is also known as the Earth Summit (see UNCED, 1992).

2/ UNCED 1992: Chapter 14.

From the Stockholm Conference on the Environment in 1972 to the World Food Summit in 1996, international leaders and heads of state have collaboratively searched for solutions to poverty 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.

Approximately 800 million people struggle daily to meet their basic food requirements, many of them relying on access to land for their subsistence. Sixty per cent of these people are rural populations living in environmentally sensitive areas of low agricultural productivity. In many developing countries, having access to land is the only way poor rural households can develop sustainable livelihoods. The manner by which land is regulated and property rights enforced determines the incentives and opportunities for the rural poor to:

- ❖ *ensure their household food security;*
- ❖ *earn income by producing marketable surpluses;*
- ❖ *accumulate capital and assets;*
- ❖ *access financial services;*
- ❖ *invest in alternative income-generating strategies;*
- ❖ *use their own labour to sustain the natural resource base;*
- ❖ *build reserves to cope with drought and preserve their assets during periods of agricultural stress.*

Sustainable agriculture: issues and solutions

Sustainable agriculture and rural development is essentially a function of the way people organize their social, environmental, economic and political systems to determine who has the rights to use which resources, in what ways, for how long and for what purposes. The key to sustainable rural development is legally secure access to assets by the land poor. When property rights are lacking or insecure, farmers can not be sure they will benefit from their efforts and therefore lack the incentive to invest in sustainable practices of land management. The resulting land degradation and soil loss threaten the livelihoods of millions of people as well as future food security, with implications also for water resources and the conservation of biodiversity. This vicious cycle linking poverty to the degradation of natural resources can be broken, however, by ensuring that the rural poor gain secure access to land, water, credit, information and technology.

A growing body of knowledge confirms the existence of an inverse relationship between farm size, and the sustainability and productivity of agricultural activities. In other words, smallholder farms are potentially more productive and environmentally sustainable than large-scale commercial agriculture concerns. Land tenure reform, therefore, contributes not only to social equity for smallholders but also to the goal of sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD): "increasing production on land already in use and avoiding further encroachment on land that is only marginally suited to cultivation" (chapter 14, *ibid.*).

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 the sustainable management of land and soils. Scientists and development practitioners acknowledge that the real causes of soil degradation are the imbalances in power, wealth, knowledge and access to resources. They assert that the restoration of degraded lands and the protection of water, soils and forests requires that the poor acquire secure access to land and to the related downstream services and productive resources.

In many countries, an historic urban bias continues to lead to the neglect of rural areas and peoples. Today, the number of rural poor is continuing to rise as they are joined by those displaced as the result of the privatization of common property, the expansion of commercial agriculture and the eruption of ethnic and other conflicts over land. Where there is conflict over land, there cannot be sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Land distribution contributes not only to social equity for small landholders but also to sustainable agriculture and rural development. By ensuring the sanctity of property rights and by providing the rural poor with access to land, water, credit, information, and technology, the links among hunger, poverty and the degradation of natural resources can be broken. Appropriate land tenure, land use and property rights can improve food security, increase the incomes of the rural poor, reduce landholding inequalities and prevent rural conflicts. Secure access to land can also catalyse practices of sustainable resource use, improve soil management and contribute to combating desertification.

Despite these compelling arguments, efforts to implement such policies are often met with substantive political and economic obstacles. Even in countries committed to improving access to land and the security of tenure, implementation is often slow, delayed or manipulated by the power of vested interests and the landed class. In other cases, the lack of beneficiary participation has limited the impact and sustainability of reform efforts.

Even in the face of these failures, the increasing efforts of civil society, the rise of democratic institutions and an increased awareness of the political consequences associated with rural neglect indicate the emergence of more favourable enabling conditions. There are also indications that the rural poor may achieve greater access to land with the emergence of advantageous market conditions and as economic liberalization gradually eliminates the subsidies that have favoured large-scale farmers. Land taxes are also making the practice of holding land for speculative purposes more costly. In addition, a variety of land-tenure markets are revealing new ways by which the rural poor might gain improved access to resources. These include market-assisted land reform, land leasing and alternative sharecropping systems. The real obstacles to land access, however, are not technical but institutional and political.

**rural sector reform = access to land and tenure + support services +
resistance from landowners and vested**

The history of agriculture-sector reform has shown that civil-society movements lacking the necessary institutional and public support and government-led reforms lacking the support of civil-society have both failed. What are needed are revitalized alliances between governments and their civil-society organizations, coupled with the moral and financial persuasion of the international community.

Participation will remain limited, however, until effective institutions are developed that not only give a voice to farmers in setting sustainable policies, but also empower farmers consistently to engage decision-makers and to build a broader base of public support. Without sustained dialogue, it is unlikely that local governments will develop the political commitments needed for sustainable agriculture-sector reform. The capacity of farmer organizations also must be strengthened and alliances between them and like-minded organizations forged.



good governance
interests ^{3/}



Governments must play their part

In order to realize lasting improvements in the livelihood systems of the rural poor, governments must first create and nurture an environment where property rights are respected. This should involve the construction of appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks with effective mechanisms for the monitoring, supervision and enforcement of legal codes governing land ownership at the national and local level.

Second, governments must abandon the historic urban bias in their development policies and pay greater attention to the poor and displaced, whose numbers continue to rise as a result of expanding commercial agriculture, ethnic conflicts and other speculative factors.

Third, governments need to promote a wider distribution of the benefits of agrarian development, minimize negative ecological impacts on the natural resource base and adapt farm structures and land-tenure patterns so that they increase food production.

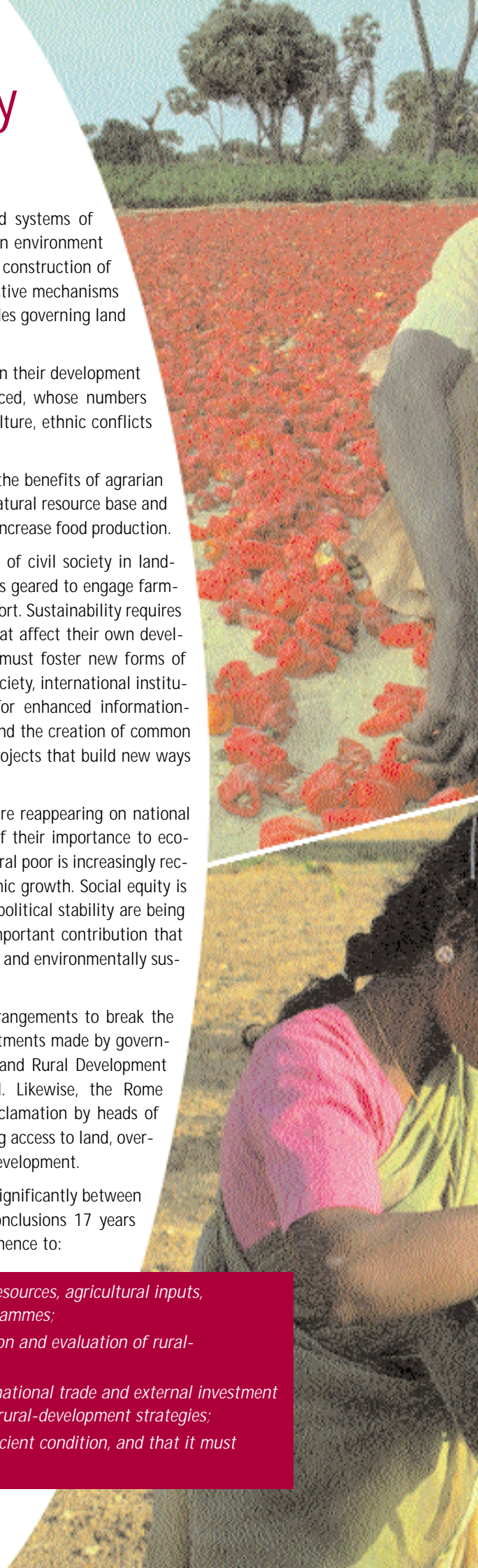
Fourth, governments need to foster the active participation of civil society in land-reform efforts. This should involve the creation of institutions geared to engage farmers with policy-makers and build a broad base of public support. Sustainability requires that people be empowered to participate in the decisions that affect their own development. At the policy level, this means that governments must foster new forms of multi-stakeholder partnerships among their agencies, civil society, international institutions and rural people. These partnerships should strive for enhanced information-sharing; better targeting of existing resources to the poor; and the creation of common agendas for action, public awareness campaigns and pilot projects that build new ways of working together.

Today, land-tenure reform and access to productive assets are reappearing on national and international agendas based on an acknowledgement of their importance to economic, social and political stability. Asset ownership by the rural poor is increasingly recognized as an essential requirement for broad-based economic growth. Social equity is gaining the stature of a global value. Good governance and political stability are being recognized as prerequisites to economic growth. And the important contribution that traditional knowledge can make to the eradication of poverty and environmentally sustainable development is also gaining greater recognition.

This acknowledging of the potential of improved tenure arrangements to break the cycle of poverty and soil degradation is not new. The commitments made by governments at the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) indicated that this understanding was global. Likewise, the Rome Declaration of the 1996 World Food Summit, agreed by acclamation by heads of state and governments, emphasized the links among providing access to land, overcoming hunger and achieving environmentally sustainable development.

The essential components of a plan of action do not change significantly between WCARRD's 1979 findings and the World Food Summit's conclusions 17 years later. Both WCARRD and the World Food Summit give prominence to:

- ❖ *poor rural people gaining access 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;*
- ❖ *the adjustment of the structure and pattern of international trade and external investment to facilitate the implementation of poverty-oriented rural-development strategies;*
- ❖ *the principle that growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and that it must be buttressed by equity and people's participation.*





The practical implementation of the principles and objectives of sustainable agriculture and rural development requires action on a broad front supported by adequate resources. Such action should aim to unite local communities, NGOs, government institutions, intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions with a common strategy using appropriate resources.

The international community has recognized the need for an integrated approach to the protection and sustainable management of land and soil resources that involves all people, non-governmental and community-based organizations and, in particular, women, whose vital role in rural well-being is frequently under-valued and lacking support. Such an approach should include action to ensure secure land tenure and increased access to land, credit and training, and the removal of obstacles that inhibit farmers, especially small-scale farmers and peasants, from investing in and improving their land and farms.

Special opportunities must be offered whereby indigenous people can benefit from their historical, integral and inviolable relationship with the land and other natural resources. For example, paragraph 26.1 of Agenda 21^{4/} recognizes the "... interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of indigenous people", and 26.3(ii) recognizes "... that the lands of indigenous people and their communities should be protected from activities that are environmentally unsound or that [the] indigenous people concerned consider to be socially and culturally inappropriate".

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, endorsed at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, emphasizes land tenure in successive chapters, including "Combating Poverty", "Management of Land Resources", "Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development", and "Strengthening the Role of Farmers". The World Food Summit Plan of Action also repeatedly draws attention to the inadequate access by the rural poor to the means of production, including land, water, inputs, appropriate technologies and farm credit. The importance of these elements is reinforced by the mandate of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty, a coalition of civil-society and inter-governmental organizations whose mandate is to revive agrarian reform through a holistic approach that incorporates land tenure, support services and participation by the rural poor in the formulation of public policies affecting the livelihood systems of their communities.

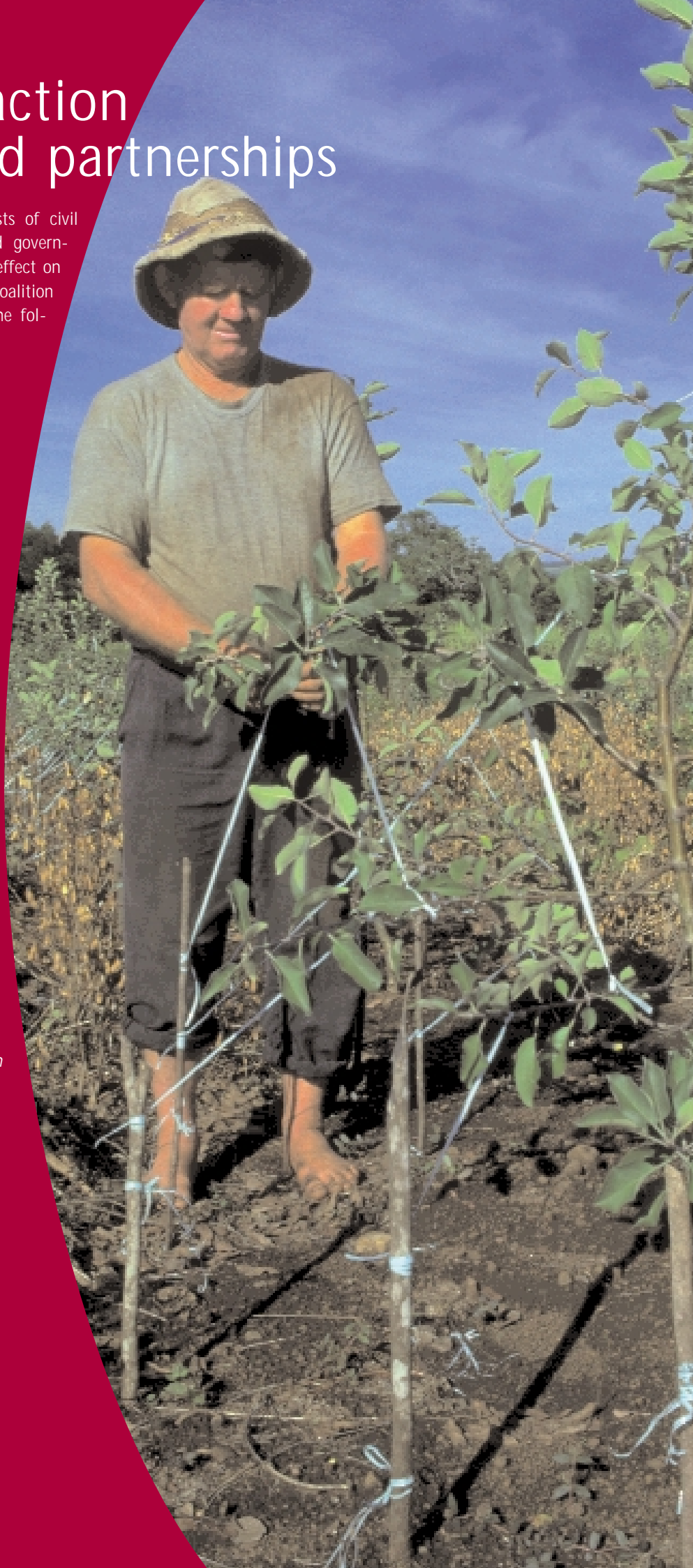
4/ Agenda 21 refers to the Programme of Action for Sustainable Development agreed at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the "Earth Summit", that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 3-14 June, 1992 (UNCED, 1992).

Institutional action and partnerships

Where it is possible to merge the interests of civil society, intergovernmental organizations and governments into a common effort, the synergistic effect on rural reform can be promising. The Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty suggests the following plan:

1. Supporting Alliances among Sectors

- ❖ *Build broad-based political and economic support for land-tenure reform, access to farm inputs (including credit and technology), and protection of the natural resource base.*
- ❖ *Inform the general public, through educational programmes, that smallholder farms are potentially more productive and environmentally sustainable than large-scale commercial agriculture.*
- ❖ *Establish coalitions of urban and rural people around such common concerns as the effects of the rural exodus on rural economies and urban poverty.*
- ❖ *Promote innovative opportunities for public debate on citizen resource rights and the role of sustainable agriculture in improving rural livelihood systems.*
- ❖ *Strengthen the collection, analysis and sharing of knowledge on the innovative approaches to land reform that can overcome the constraints experienced in earlier models of agriculture-sector reform.*



2. Assisting Governments

- ❖ *Establish appropriate legal, regulatory and judicial frameworks that can register and protect people's resource rights.*
- ❖ *Promote the "ratification and application of existing international conventions relevant to indigenous people and their communities and promote the adoption by the General Assembly of a declaration on indigenous rights"^{5/}.*
- ❖ *Establish independent and accountable land commissions, with adequate participation by potential beneficiaries.*
- ❖ *Ensure that women's names appear on land records, that their rights be enshrined in communal property systems, and that the inheritance rights of widows and daughters be established and protected, and promote representation by women in local decision-making bodies and on land commissions.*
- ❖ *Halt the expansion of the agricultural frontier onto fragile lands.*
- ❖ *Remove the subsidies and tax provisions that provide distorting privileges to large-scale farmers.*
- ❖ *Establish land-tax systems, especially for underutilized land and land held for speculative purposes.*
- ❖ *Develop methods for increasing financing for land reform and post-land acquisition services, including land banks, land-for-debt schemes and land for taxes.*
- ❖ *Strengthen land registries, cadastre systems and land-survey methods.*
- ❖ *Develop human capital by investing in rural schools, health facilities and extension services.*
- ❖ *Establish mechanisms for the speedy settlement of land disputes.*

3. Strengthening Rural People's Organizations


- ❖ *Support consciousness-raising among landless and near-landless people regarding their rights and the opportunities for change.*
- ❖ *Strengthen rural workers and peasant organizations, ensuring that they include women-headed households, widows, indigenous people, lower castes and other marginalized population groups.*
- ❖ *Foster the organization of communities into units of sufficient scale constituted of viable credit and marketing systems that will be of interest to commercial service providers.*
- ❖ *Protect indigenous people's knowledge and strengthen the efficiency of their resource-management systems^{6/}.*
- ❖ *Demarcate and protect traditional forms of land tenure with, for example, the registration of common property and pastoral areas.*
- ❖ *Promote improved land-management and soil-conservation practices.*
- ❖ *Ensure beneficiary participation in land-valuation processes and in determining repayment terms based on available labour, production skills, the productive capacity of the land, available technology and projected profitability.*
- ❖ *Ensure the cost-effective provision of rural services by using community-based organizations to deliver government programmes.*

4. Working in Partnership with International Organizations

- ❖ *Leverage the moral persuasion and financial conditionality of international organizations in order to place issues of land and resource rights on national agendas.*
- ❖ *Elaborate participatory methods to assist governments and civil society in monitoring progress toward secure access to land and other productive assets in the context of the World Food Summit and the Commission on Sustainable Development.*

5/ UNCED, 1992: 26.4.

6/ UNCED, 1992: 26.5.



The Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty

Mission

Eradicating hunger and poverty by empowering the rural poor through agrarian reform and access to productive assets.

The Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty is a global consortium of intergovernmental, civil-society and bilateral organizations committed to the empowerment of the rural poor. It has determined that empowerment can best be achieved through increasing the access of the poor to productive assets, especially land, water and common-property resources, and direct participation in decision-making processes at local, national, regional and international levels. The Popular Coalition aims to build strategic alliances among diverse development organizations, placing particular emphasis on the role of civil society in overcoming hunger and poverty.

Governance and Participation

Seven civil-society organizations plus five intergovernmental organizations comprise the 12-member Popular Coalition Steering Committee. The seven civil-society representatives are selected by their regional peers to achieve balance from South and South-East Asia and the Pacific; West and Central Africa; East and Southern Africa; North Africa and the Near East; Central and Latin America, the Caribbean; the OECD and northern partners. The five intergovernmental organizations are the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme, the World Bank and the European Commission. While the global focal point is located at IFAD in Rome, the programme of work is undertaken by geographical nodes, which provide the decentralized means for participation and grass-roots operation.

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