

## **Keynote: Global Partnerships to Sustain Land Use**

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As far back as 1988, 18% of rural households in developing countries were landless. Numerous studies have shown that this group of over 350 million people is the most vulnerable to poverty and the effects of land degradation. Their daily struggle to survive preempts them from making the investments needed to ensure long-term sustainable agriculture and the protection of the soils upon which their livelihood and that of future generations depends.

Today, it is estimated that 500 of the 800 million people suffering from household food insecurity are rural people who live in environmentally sensitive areas of low productivity. The food security challenge is growing as the poverty gap widens, both within and between nations. As the gap in access to productive resources grows, the gap becomes a growing threat to household food security, environmental sustainability, and international peace. This alarming gap is a dramatic indicator of the imbalances that contribute to a culture of exclusion that denies the poor access to opportunities for development. In 1960, the top 20% of the world's population had incomes 30 times the poorest 20%. Today, the gap is 60 times. In a world of plenty, this is morally unacceptable and environmentally unsustainable.

Historically, these politically marginal, rural peoples have been neglected. Their numbers are continuing to rise as they are joined by new groups being displaced from more fertile areas through a variety of processes including land degradation; expropriation; demographic pressures; privatization of common property land; and, the expansion of commercial agriculture with its reduced demand for labor due to mechanization. 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 their main source of production and the basis of their family's livelihood.

Over the past 25 years, international leaders and Heads of State have searched for a common global agenda through the well-known Summit processes. The inaugural Stockholm Conference on the Environment in 1972 was followed by Habitat in 1976, the Earth Summit in Rio, the issues of population and development in Cairo, the empowerment of women at Beijing, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the recent World Food Summit in 1996.

Each Summit examined a pending crisis - the environment, development, energy, or food. Of the many conclusions, the one of most significance is that there are no separate crises. They are all the same. An analysis of the Summit declarations finds that the single most important and

common cause and affect is poverty resulting from the unequal access and use of natural resources. If the protocols were blended into one international plan, the call would be for action on the inequitable distribution of wealth, the lack of access by the poor to productive resources, insufficient participation by the poor in decisions which affect their daily lives and the need for reforms in macro-economic policies that adversely affect the poor.

It is generally accepted that the real causes of soil degradation are poverty; the unequal distribution of land; low agricultural productivity; population growth; low absorption rates for rural labor; limited opportunities for alternative income; and, in some cases commercial agricultural development.

Scientists and development practitioners increasingly recognize that the restoration of degraded lands and the protection of water, soils, and forests requires that the poor acquire secure access to land and the related downstream services and productive resources.

Household food security is a daily issue of survival for the landless and the rural poor. Soil conservation, on the other hand, serves to increase yields in the future and increase the value of land as a capital asset. Understandably, when property rights are lacking or insecure, farmers cannot be sure they will receive the benefits and thereby lack the incentives to invest in sustainable land use practices.

In rural areas of most developing countries, land is not only the primary means for generating a livelihood, but also the vehicle to accumulate capital and transfer it between generations. The manner by which land is regulated, rights are assigned and conflicts are resolved affects:

- The ability of households to produce for their subsistence and to generate 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 sustain the natural resource base;
- The opportunity for the poor to access financial services; and,
- The capacity to build family reserves to cope with drought and protect their assets during periods of agricultural stress.

Clearly, the institutional policy and regulatory frameworks governing land distribution and tenurial security has a critical bearing on the social fabric of societies and on overall economic development. The process of empowering the poor, eradicating hunger and poverty and preserving

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soils requires access to land, water, credit and technology.

Soil conservation and natural resource management strategies in the past tended to neglect social, economic, and institutional factors and concentrated almost exclusively on the technical aspects. Today, decision-makers are beginning to understand the interactions between poverty, land rights, and the sustainable use of natural resources. While at an early stage, there is an emerging political commitment to re-focus national and international agendas on the revival of agrarian reform.

The potential for property rights to break the cycle of poverty and soil degradation is not new. The commitments by governments to the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) acknowledged that this understanding was global. The 1996 World Food Summit emphasized again the direct line between access to land and environmentally sustainable development.

However, then as now, land tenure and property rights touch on the fundamental inequities in rural societies. Much of the cultivated, fertile land is held by a small number of powerful landowners and elites. It follows that tenurial security and property rights can reduce landholding inequalities, prevent rural conflicts, contribute to improved food security, and increase the incomes of the rural poor. Secure access to land can catalyze practices of sustainable resource use and soil management including combating desertification.

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. Fortunately, new opportunities are emerging that can create more favorable enabling conditions. These include the successful efforts of civil society, the rise of democratic institutions and increased political awareness of the consequences of continuing to neglect rural populations. Furthermore, economic liberalization is gradually eliminating the subsidies that formerly favored large farmers. Governments increasingly need to develop a tax base that includes land. Where large landholdings have served as a hedge against inflation, the costs of continuing to hold land for speculative purposes is becoming more costly. Land that formerly held inflated values is now expected to come onto the market at competitive prices, as taxation will increase the quantity of land available for sale.

Today, agrarian reform is returning to the agenda based on recognition of its importance to economic, social, and political stability. Asset ownership by the rural poor is increasingly recognized as being essential to sustained and broad based economic growth. Social equity is a driving global value. Good governance and political stability are recognized prerequisites to economic growth and the eradication of poverty.

Agrarian reform is most often considered to define property relationships since it involves a wide range of essential technical elements. However, first and foremost agrarian reform is about sustainable development. Sustainable development is essentially about people and the way they organize their social, economic, and political systems to make the critical decisions on who has the right

to use which resources, in which ways, for how long and for which purposes.

Agrarian reform is first and foremost about changing relationships. First, it aims to change land tenure relationships. Second, it aims to change the current culture of exclusion so that the poor gain access to credit, technology, markets, and other productive services. Third, it aims for the poor to be active participants in the development of government policies and program affecting their communities and livelihoods.

While social relationships are complex and therefore do not lend themselves to formulas, the use of a mathematical analogy can illustrate the components of the process that need to be incorporated into agrarian reform planning.

$\text{Agrarian Reform} = \text{Land Tenure} + \text{Support Services} + \text{Good Governance}$ <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Resistance from Landowner</b></p>
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The history of agrarian reform has shown that civil society movements without institutional and public support or government led reforms without the support of civil society have both failed. The lessons from the past also teach us that social change proceeds technological and economic transformation. Moreover, the record from development assistance and official aid emphasizes that sustainability requires that people be empowered to be the agents of their own development.

Accordingly, there cannot be empowerment of people if they do not participate in the decisions that affect them. At the same time, participation is meaningless if it does not result in improved access to productive resources.

The past has shown that approaching agrarian reform through narrow interventions, as a means to initiate broader policy dialogue and program support, was generally not successful. It has also been recognized that the parallel work of civil society, governments, and the intergovernmental community has become trapped in the differences between these sectors.

For some time, there has been a recognized need to foster new forms of partnership between civil society, governments and international organizations. The need is for information sharing, to promote dialogue among affected groups and to contribute to consensus building. There is also need for pilot projects that can build new ways of work and better target existing resources to the poor.

At the 1995 Conference on Hunger and Poverty, sponsored by the International Fund for Agriculture Development, a diverse group of stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, NGOs, government officials, bilateral agencies and international financial institutions produced a consolidated analysis on the constraints to sustainable human development. They called for urgent action to revive agrarian reform on national and international agendas. They committed themselves to form a Coalition of equals that would unite their common concerns into one agenda to empower the rural poor through improved access to productive assets. The Coalition partners include the

International Fund for Agricultural Development which serves as the international focal point, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Program, the World Bank, the European Commission and seven regional civil society / NGO networks.

The Popular Coalition aims to build strategic and innovative alliances between diverse development organizations giving particular emphasis to the role of civil society in gaining access to land and water and by increasing their direct participation in decision-making from the local to the international level.

The Coalition is not a new organization. It is a mechanism for innovation, dialogue and to pilot activities in agrarian reform. The strength of the Coalition is the different spheres of influence of its different members. It has significant capacity to make a difference by bringing the existing resources of its partners into coherent and well-targeted country program. The vision is that the partners will incorporate into their own organizations the successful results and lessons learned from the initiatives jointly undertaken through the Popular Coalition. The resources come from all of the partners, both civil society and intergovernmental. The Coalition's Guiding Principles requires that all partners contribute to and share in mobilizing the overall resources.

The Popular Coalition's program of action is informed by three key lessons from the past:

- The need for a broad based and comprehensive approach to agrarian reform involving consensus building and policy dialogue;
- The political sensitivities involved in agrarian reform will require that the viability of the proposed approaches have been well demonstrated before policy makers will consider adopting reform on a large scale; and,
- The need to strengthen the capacity of community organizations so that they can become effective interlocutors with their government for policy development and to execute program delivery.

Globalization is changing the old adage of *Think Globally, Act Locally*. On the eve of the new millennium, the challenges of poverty and the threats of environmental degradation requires advocacy and action from the local to the international level. Two key tools for engagement are knowledge and capacity building. It is here that the Popular Coalition is innovative. The Coalition recognizes that its partners have their own program aimed at empowering rural peoples. The value of the Coalition will be to add knowledge and capacity to its partners, to capture the opportunities for synergy and to influence one another to incorporate the improvements that arise through joint Coalition analysis and projects.

The Coalition has therefore formed a knowledge network to capture the lessons learned from the practical work of civil society. The Popular Coalition Agrarian Reform Network, soon to be available on the web as AR net, will equip communities attempting to address a particular agrarian reform issue to benefit from the experience of those who have overcome similar constraints elsewhere. This

knowledge will also strengthen the policy dialogue between civil society organizations and their governments. Further knowledge is also resulting from the first of many knowledge forums of AR net, this one examining the conditions necessary for the rural poor to benefit from market-assisted land reform. Through 24 national and 8 regional nodes that currently comprise AR net, the Coalition intends to support the replication and scaling up of successful agrarian reform initiatives. The results will be used to demonstrate to governments the importance and methods of incorporating these experiences into public policies and program. Through AR net international, regional, national and grassroots organizations are gaining from each other's knowledge and collaborating to promote the successful practices, policies and innovative institutional arrangements linking civil society and government.

The Community Empowerment Facility of the Coalition has been created to support local groups to build their own institutional and analytical capacity. Communities will become better equipped to place their particular and ecologically specific land issues on the agenda with their civic and political officials.

The Community Empowerment Facility will:

- Strengthen the negotiating ability of the poor, especially women and indigenous peoples, to achieve secure access to land including common property, water and associated support services;
- Facilitate community participation in policy dialogue and representation in local governance;
- Build on traditional organizations and practices;
- Strengthen rural people's organizations in solidarity with others;
- Address reforms required in agrarian institutions;
- Facilitate conflict resolution processes;
- Replicate and scale up agrarian reform models; and,
- Disseminate best practices and lessons learned.

In reflection of the need for wider political space, the Coalition is developing a program to popularize agrarian reform. The aim is to place the issues in the public domain, in both the south and the north, for the purpose of building consensus among the many stakeholders on strategies for implementation and methods for resolving conflicts. Agrarian reform and sustainable soil management cannot hope to succeed where there are conflicts over the natural resources that need to be sustained. In order to be effective, strategies must engage all who have an interest in the land in question. This will range from the landless to agricultural laborers, commercial farmers, traders and moneylenders, absentee landowners, political leaders, concerned persons from other sectors and urban allies with ties to rural families.

In closing, the Coalition believes that the right to land and water is basic to durable solutions to hunger and poverty. The Coalition is striving to create the enabling conditions, at national and international levels, for policy dialogue and participatory planning. The Coalition is unique in its emphasis on strengthening its partners to enhance their agrarian reform policies and program and to target the use of their resources in a more coherent framework based on the

lesson of the past.

Agrarian reform is about people. For the Popular Coalition, it is about fostering the social relationships by which the rural poor are empowered with the resources to develop sustainable livelihoods. In so doing, the natural resource base upon which current and future generations depend will be managed more sustainably. The answer to questions about sustainable land use will be much more encouraging.