



**Enabling the Rural Poor to Overcome Poverty**

**Land, Empowerment and the Rural Poor:  
Challenges to Civil Society and Development Agencies**

*Issues for Discussion*

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## Summary

Three-fourths of the world's 1.2 billion poor are rural poor. Lack of access to and control over land and water resources is largely the cause of their economic poverty, social exclusion, political subordination and cultural marginalization. Recent global campaigns to end poverty, however laudable, have tended to avoid the issue of democratizing access to and control over productive resources. When such campaigns have addressed the issue of access to resources, they have tended to avoid public policies that explicitly confront the structural and institutional causes of rural poverty. But if poverty is to be ended worldwide, anti-poverty campaigns have to focus on the rural world. If rural poverty is to be eradicated, democratizing access to and control over land and water resources must become central.

Four existing views about agrarian reform strategies are discussed, i.e. market-led, state-led, poor people-led, and state/society-driven. Taken together, they underscore the importance of civil society organizations in the pursuit of agrarian reform. A market-led view emphasizes land sales and rental transactions, the voluntary attitude of landlords (the sellers), and the formally articulated demand from and willingness of the rural households (the buyers) to participate in land transactions. Recent experiments, however, show results far below the promised outcomes. A state-led perspective emphasizes the role of government to carry out expropriatory land redistribution, but gives a complementary role to 'beneficiaries' associations'. Under certain conditions historically, this approach has delivered pro-poor outcomes that varied nonetheless between and within countries over time. A poor people-led view gives the key role to strong and independent peasant movements for successful agrarian reform. Under certain limited circumstances, this approach has also resulted in positive outcomes, but has nonetheless proven to be, on its own, insufficient to carry out large-scale restructuring of agrarian societies. A state/society-driven perspective considers the interactions between state, market and civil society actors as a crucial factor that largely determines the processes and outcomes of agrarian reform. More specifically, it shows why and how mutually re-enforcing state-society interactions positively influence the processes and outcomes of redistributive land reforms.

It is not the objective here to argue which of these four perspectives on agrarian reform strategies is most desirable. Rather, the aim is to clarify the contemporary context for civil society-related campaigns for redistributive land reform, and for a discussion about a possible set of guiding principles for a poverty-reducing agrarian reform. Three key features of a poverty-reducing agrarian reform are identified, i.e. poor people-initiated, livelihood-enhancing/creating, and state-supported. These are three broadly distinct but interlinked components of a 'tripod' agrarian reform framework that are likely to contribute to empowering the rural poor and to enabling them to overcome their long-standing economic poverty, social exclusion and political subordination. These three factors should not be de-linked from each other, analytically or empirically.

*Poor people-initiated.* A 'tripod' agrarian reform framework assigns the greatest role to organizations and movements of the rural poor, but resists romanticising their power. Alone, poor people's organizations are less able to significantly change the terms and conditions of pre-existing social relations. Certain types of civil society organizations, however, under certain conditions, are more likely to play a positive role in promoting agrarian reform than others. Civil

society organizations can be highly heterogeneous, based on constituency, ideology, strategy and level of operation, and include poor people's organizations (POs), intermediary NGOs, and academic and research institutions. The more effective types are those that have high degrees of capacity *and* autonomy – the twin dimensions of organizational power. But in examining civil society and its potentially positive role specifically in redistributive agrarian reform, it is crucial to take an even more differentiated view. Different kinds of groups have a distinct role to play in rural poor people's struggles for land and livelihoods, and so would entail different types of support. Here, the term 'rural poor' refers to the rural (semi)proletariat, (sub-)subsistence owner-cultivators, share tenants, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peasants and rural women.

Development undertakings aimed at enhancing the power of the rural poor can begin by providing assistance that is explicitly autonomy-promoting and capacity-enhancing. Repeated development initiatives by many agencies tend to be overly focused on technical capacity-building and often end up producing outcomes that are more of the same. In order to achieve a more balanced and improved impact, interventions in development undertakings, however difficult and complex these may be, ought to be more autonomy-enhancing. It is also important to develop better linkages between levels of civil society organization (i.e. local, national and regional/international) in terms of increasing the degree of representation and accountability within and between them. An important question for civil society and development agencies on the issue of promoting poor people-initiated campaigns is *whether and how and to what extent their views on civil society and their assistance to the latter have been differentiated and balanced in terms of capacity-enhancement and autonomy-improvement efforts, and properly focused on the critical linkages between different levels of organization.*

*Livelihood-enhancing/creating.* Land reform can potentially be exclusionary, benefiting the relatively better-off and non-poor rather than the rural poor (and thereby excluding usually women, farmworkers and indigenous communities). Livelihoods that have subsequently emerged could thus also mean a subsequent loss of livelihood for others. There is therefore an urgent need to ensure that the character of land policies is truly inclusive and pro-poor. Development undertakings should build on the empirical reality that the livelihoods of the rural poor, even poor farmers, on most occasions, are not solely agricultural. Rural poor people's livelihoods are far more diversified than usually understood. The key to sustainable, diversified livelihoods is access to five types of capital assets (namely, financial, human, natural, cultural, and social), which in real life are rarely democratically controlled and equitably distributed. The challenge here is how civil society and development agencies could assist rural poor people to gain effective access.

In the context of agrarian reform, it is crucial that the initiatives to gain access to and control over land and water resources are incorporated in the overall pursuit of getting access to or building other capital assets. Ensuring poor people's access to key natural resources would entail significant reforms at the macro, (inter)national policy level, such as policy reforms affecting the input (e.g. credit) and output (e.g. trade) markets, and other labour-oriented policies (e.g. trans/national rural-urban labour linkages). Social capital is critical to the poor people's ability to mobilize to gain access to and/or build these different types of capital assets, and under certain conditions, civil society organizations and development agencies may be able to assist the rural poor in social capital-building. An important question for civil society organizations and development agencies that have been involved in agrarian reform is *whether and how and to what*

*extent they have systematically gone beyond the struggles for land access to incorporate other struggles to gain, and initiatives to build, the other capital assets important to the rural poor.*

Finally, pro-poor land policies in most contexts in the developing world today entail the redistribution of land-based wealth and power. Truly redistributive land policies need to be *state-supported* because it is the state that has the authority to command compliance from recalcitrant landed elites. One of the key factors for a successful redistributive reform is the institutionalization of progressive legal reforms, such as pro-poor land laws, and here, state actors have a critical role to play. Like civil society organizations, state actors, under certain circumstances, may be able to undertake autonomous actions ‘from above’ that run counter to the interests of dominant social groups. But alone, they are far less likely to actually accomplish far-reaching and meaningful redistributive reforms. Mutually reinforcing interactions between state reformers and autonomous civil society organizations are crucial if the obstacles and constraints are to be overcome, and the opportunities for redistributive land reform are to be harnessed. Unfortunately, this kind of ‘state-society’ interaction is not a common phenomenon in the world today. The key challenge therefore involves figuring out *how to create the conditions necessary for progressive coalitions between reformers within governments and autonomous civil society organizations to emerge and expand.*

In response to these issues, questions and challenges, civil society organizations and development agencies, including IFAD, must build on what they have so far accomplished in these areas. And there are indeed significant achievements to date. But the extent of the problems that needs to be addressed demands more, in terms of the quantity and quality of initiatives that contribute to the building of autonomous spaces for civil society and progressive interface between the latter and (inter)governmental agencies. Moreover, if pro-poor land policies were to be carried out more significantly in the future, then development agencies and civil society organizations, including IFAD, will remain confronted by the most fundamental question of all, i.e. *whether and how can civil society organizations and development agencies actually expand and deepen their support for rural poor people in their contentious political struggles for land and livelihoods and the redistribution of wealth and power?*

*Poverty reduction is not something that governments, development institutions or NGOs can do for the poor. They can forge partnerships and help promote the conditions in which the poor can use their own skills and talents to work their way out of poverty.*

- IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2001

This paper aims to raise issues for discussion and reflection about the potentially positive role of civil society organizations in framing and implementing pro-poor land policies in developing countries, and about how such a role might be sustained and enhanced. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first section briefly reviews the changed context for land reform today, identifying old and new issues that have persisted and emerged over time. It then presents the various perspectives on strategies for pro-poor land policies, identifying the distinct role assigned to civil society organizations by each perspective. This first section thus clarifies the institutional object and context of civil society collective actions around pro-poor land policies. The second section turns to focus on the role of civil society in framing and implementing pro-poor land policies, and on how to enhance this role. It disaggregates and differentiates civil society actors, analyze their dynamic interactions with other state and non-state actors, and raises issues and questions for discussion. The final section outlines the challenges to civil society and development agencies on how to contribute toward enhancing the role of various civil society organizations in the pursuit of agrarian reform.

### **Section 1: Agrarian Reforms – Past and Present**

Land reform is back on the policy agenda of international development institutions as well as of many nation states, although it never really disappeared from the political agenda of rural social movements. Poverty has remained largely a rural phenomenon globally, with three-fourths of the world's poor constituted by the *rural* poor despite efforts by national governments, international institutions and civil society. Effective control over productive resources, especially land and water, by the rural poor is crucial to their autonomy and capacity to construct a rural livelihood and to overcome poverty. This is largely because in many countries today a significant portion of the income of the rural poor still comes from farming, despite far-reaching livelihood diversification processes that have occurred in different places over time. As a result, lack of control over land and water resources is strongly related to poverty and inequality. Moreover, land has a multidimensional character: it is important not only for economic livelihoods, but also as a socio-political resource for poor people to exercise their citizenship rights, and as a cultural factor crucial for the preservation of people's collective identity and dignity.

States have been driven by a variety of motives in carrying out land reforms up to the 1980s. These can be broadly differentiated between economic and socio-political ones.<sup>1</sup> The economic basis for land reform remains founded on the assumption that large farms under-utilize

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<sup>1</sup> This brief overview on the underlying reasons for land reform draws from Borras, Kay and Akram Lodhi (2005).

land, while small farms are wasteful of labour, resulting in low levels of land and labour productivity and consequently leading to poverty. At the same time, most agrarian societies are marked by un(der)employment of labour and scarcity of land. From an economic consideration, it is deemed more logical to raise land productivity than to try to increase labour productivity, at least as a first radical step toward restructure preexisting social and production relations. There has thus been a broad consensus among scholars and policymakers coming from diverse ideological perspectives on the relevance of land reform for economic development and rural poverty eradication. Yet opinion is divided over the longer-term perspective -- that is, in what overall type of development paradigm does land reform figure, or toward what developmental end should the rural surplus be directed. This more fundamental issue has been linked to debates about what type of organization of production should be adopted, i.e. individual or collective farms, after restructuring of landed property rights has occurred.

Meanwhile, various socio-political logics have been equally powerful in shaping the rise (and fall) of land reforms in different countries over time. First, decolonization processes unleashed immediately after World War II, which continued in some places until the 1980s, became important contexts for land redistribution campaigns in many countries up to the present. Second, geo-political and ideological imperatives in the context of the Cold War provided another set of factors behind the rise of land reform on international and national policy agendas. Third, land reform also held a key place in alternative national projects heralded by victorious peasant-based revolutions. Fourth, in reaction to external and internal political pressures, land reform was used by central states to 'manage' significant episodes of peasant unrest, whether communist-instigated or not. What later emerged as scattered patches of successful land redistribution outcomes within these countries revealed the capacity of central states to respond, albeit selectively and partially, to rural unrest.

Fifth, land reform was also often used to legitimize and/or consolidate the claim to state power by one faction of the elite against another. Finally, and perhaps more commonly, central authorities (capitalist or socialist) almost always have used land reform to further state-building agendas. Land redistribution, registration and titling required standardized cadastral maps, legal titles, peasant household census, and so on, are some of the examples. These administrative requirements, in turn, have fed into the desire of central state authorities to extend their administrative, political and military-police presence and authority into 'untamed' parts of state-claimed territory and to expand the central state's tax base.

Thus fueled by different economic and socio-political reasoning, land reforms were legislated and implemented in a wide variety of (sub)national settings and with a variety of results. In all the postwar land redistribution campaigns, however, the outcome in terms of redistributing all lands to all the poor households who needed them ended up falling short or remained marked by only partial success. To be sure, in a few cases the outcome was nearly complete, as in Cuba and China; elsewhere it was much less significant, as in Brazil from the 1960s to the mid-1980s (see Table A, *Annex* for comparative land reform outcomes in selected countries). Moreover, in these and other land reform processes, there were significant unintended effects and unexpected outcomes. For example, in many instances, once underway, official land reform processes spilled beyond the control of central authorities, leading to greater redistribution than originally intended.

The changed global economic and socio-political context beginning especially in the 1990s, meanwhile, has resulted in a different context for land reform. While there are many old

economic and socio-political issues around land reform that have remained important up to the present, some are clearly no longer relevant (such as the Cold War). Instead, new issues emerged that have not really been part of the land reform discourse until more recently, such as gender, the environment, human rights, ethnic violence, and indigenous land rights. NGOs, which have seen a phenomenal rise worldwide since the 1960s or so, were also not an important part of the classic land reform equation until very recently. Table B (see *Annex*) provides an overview of changes in the economic and socio-political bases of and context for land reform.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the series of agrarian reform and rural development interventions in the past, today landlessness and rural poverty remain a very significant problem in developing and transition countries. By 2006, the FAO reported that three-fourths of the world's poor, or about 900 million people, 'live in rural areas and depend on access to land and other natural resources for their livelihoods. For most of them, insecure access to land is closely linked to poverty.'<sup>3</sup> How and to what extent conditions of landed property rights and agrarian structure – in convergence with other factors such as macroeconomic and socio-political conditions – (re)shape the lives and livelihoods of the rural poor vary significantly between and within regions.

In Asia, amid rapid national economic development in China and India, national and subnational enclaves of agrarian problems have persisted, generally gravitating around the issues concerning indigenous peoples' land rights (e.g. India and the Philippines), forestry lands (e.g. Indonesia and Thailand), land degradation, greater farming family's control over the terms of land use (e.g. China and Vietnam), among others.<sup>4</sup> In Latin America, amid modest macroeconomic growth across the region and uneven degrees of industrialization and urbanization,<sup>5</sup> subnational pockets of rural poverty alongside a major cross-national poverty enclave – the Andes, have persisted. This rural poverty is closely linked to land-related problems, particularly the highly skewed distribution of landed property rights in most countries.<sup>6</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, the less vibrant macroeconomic development processes in the region in general have continued alongside low rural economic productivity gains over time. Key problems remain connected to productivity issues that in turn involve rural poor people's control over water, capital, and technology, while conflicts over the nature, pace and direction of property rights reforms in white settlers-controlled farms and communal lands have remained significant.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Near East and Northern Africa, the land question is always associated with the water question; rural poverty is closely linked to the poor people's access to and control over available land and water resources.<sup>8</sup> Finally in the transitional economies of former USSR,

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<sup>2</sup> There a number of works that discuss the changed context for agrarian reform since the 1990s that are relevant to the discussion in this paper, among them: Byres (2004) and Bernstein (2002) regarding 'agrarian transition' and labour, Razavi (2003) regarding gender, Ghimire (2005) regarding civil society and the market, Herring (2003) regarding post-Cold War world, and Livsage (2003) regarding (post)conflict situations. See also fresh analytic insights offered by Baranyi, Deere and Morales (2004), Cotula, Toulmin and Quan (2006), and Merlet, Thirion and Garces (2006) regarding more general discussions.

<sup>3</sup> FAO's ICARRD website: [www.icarrd.org](http://www.icarrd.org)

<sup>4</sup> For Vietnam, see e.g., Akram Lodhi (2005) and Kerkvliet (2005).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g. the discussion in Kay (2002), especially in the context of agrarian reform's role in development strategies (in comparative perspectives between Latin America and East Asia).

<sup>6</sup> For recent useful studies on this issue in this region, see Kay (2005), Baranyi, Deere and Morales (2004), and IFAD (2002a).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g. Toulmin and Quan (2000).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. IFAD (2002b).

including Central Asia, and some parts of Eastern Europe, productivity issues have remained central to the rural poor's capacity to transition in their livelihoods after the conclusion of most of the post-Cold War 'land redistribution'.<sup>9</sup> In short, between and within regions today, the poverty of most rural households have remained linked to the question of access to and control over land and water resources, although there are some variations on how these resources are located in the overall development policy discourse in these regions.

The persistence of many 'old' issues (along with the disappearance of others) and the emergence of new ones, in both the discourse and dynamics around land reform globally and between regions, has combined to change the structure of political opportunities and threats to land reform in the contemporary era. Unsurprisingly, different actors have responded differently to this changed opportunity structure, with some putting forward new visions of what land reform should look like and how it should be undertaken. Current perspectives can be boiled down to four broadly distinct 'ideal types', laid out here for the purpose of trying to better understand ongoing land reform initiatives. It should be noted that 'ideal types' are analytic constructs, intended as aids in the enterprise of analysis; actual realities often do not fit such categories perfectly, but are likely to fall somewhere in between and to share features across types. Shaped partly by the diversity of socio-economic, political and cultural conditions between and within countries, and partly by the varied responses of different actors to the changing context, one can thus discern four broadly distinct perspectives on achieving pro-poor land policies and sustainable livelihoods. These are the market-led, state-led, poor people-led, and state/society-driven perspectives, each of which is discussed below (and summarized in Table 1).<sup>10</sup>

From the *state-led* perspective, the reasons given for land reform always entail a convergence of many economic and socio-political considerations and calculations. This view usually treats land mainly as an economic factor of production, but also as a socio-political resource, cultural context, and sometimes even as a 'territory'. It holds that strong political will by the central state is necessary in order to defeat any opposition to reform, and is willing to employ expropriationary methods for land redistribution. The state-led view considers strong and independent peasant movements as critical to the success of any land redistribution program in theory, even though there is a strong tendency of states in practice to treat peasant organization as, or try to transform them into, subordinate administrative adjuncts in carrying out land reform.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Ho and Spoor (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> The subsequent discussion on these four ideal types draws largely from Borras, Kay and Akram Lodhi (2005). For broadly similar discussions on poor peasant-led, market-led and state-led approaches, see Rosset (2006) and Veltmeyer (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Tai (1974) is a good example of this view; for critical but related study, see Riedinger (1995).

Table 1: Key features of various perspectives in agrarian reform

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Perspective	Features
Market-led	<p>Voluntary; ‘willing seller-willing buyer’; market as main mechanism to (re)allocate resources; main consideration is economic efficiency/productivity gains; gives secondary/marginal role to central states, but assigns key role to local government units; peasants/beneficiaries are supposed to be in the ‘driver’s seat’ of reform.</p>
State-led	<p>Coercive and expropriatory; state as key mechanism to redistribute wealth; main consideration is usually related to securing/maintaining political legitimacy, though developmental agendas are also important; ‘strong political will’ is necessary to carry out land reform agenda; usually treats peasants/beneficiaries as necessary administrative adjuncts; subordinates market actors, or selectively deals with market actors depending on which actors are more influential within the state.</p>
Poor People-led	<p>Main assumption is that ‘state is too captive to societal elite interests’, while market forces are basically dominated by elite interests; thus, the only way to achieve pro-poor agrarian reform is for peasants and their organizations by themselves to take the initiative to implement agrarian reform.</p>
State/Society-driven	<p>Peasant movements are crucial factor for successful land reform, but should not romanticize the ‘omnipotence’ of peasants/beneficiaries and their organizations. The State is a critical actor in any successful land reform, but it does not assign commanding role to central state. Markets are important context within which peasants who received lands are able to construct, maintain and sustain their livelihoods (or not), but it does not provide sole importance to economic productivity-enhancement issues. Although this state/society-driven perspective recognizes the relevance of each of these three factors, it analyzes state, peasant movements, and market forces not as separate groups, but as actors inherently linked to each other by their association to the politics and economics of land resources.</p>

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Note: This table is a revised version of the one in Borras, Kay and Akram Lodhi (2005).

From a *market-led* perspective in land reform, by contrast, the main consideration is economic efficiency and productivity gains. Land is considered primarily as a commodity, a scarce resource that is an important economic factor of production. Skewed distributions of land resulting in lack of access by most rural households, is the key cause of rural poverty. Thus the need to secure access to land for the rural poor. But because central state intervention distorts (land) markets, land distribution must be carried out via a combination of market-based and market-oriented mechanisms: the ‘willing seller, willing buyer’ land transfer scheme, the promotion of land rental markets, the privatization and formalization of land titles, and the decentralization of land records and management. This view banks on the existence of strong, independent local peasant organizations that could directly negotiate with landlords for land sales, as well as on the involvement of NGOs to assist local peasant organizations in farm development requirements, such as preparing farm plans acceptable to commercial banks.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, many of the *poor people-led* perspective’s most basic assumptions are similar to those of the state-led. However, it is important to note that the poor people-led view differs from the state-led perspective in one crucial respect: it tends to assume that the state, ultimately, is too captive to anti-reform elite interests in society to be able to carry out significant redistributive reform. In the end, the state is an unreliable partner in this regard. The poor people-led perspective also views market forces as basically dominated by elite interests, and so unable to bring about truly pro-poor reform gains either. Thus, for adherents of this perspective, the only way to ensure the achievement of pro-poor agrarian reform is for peasants and their organizations to take and retain the initiative in implementing it, even if it must stand alone in doing so.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in a *state/society* perspective, it is the *interactions* between state and societal actors that actually push for land reform, or not. This view aims to take the best arguments of the state-led and poor people-led views and bring them together, with a nod as well to a few issues usually raised by market-led perspectives. The main assumptions here are notably nuanced. On the one hand, peasant movements are viewed as a crucial factor in successful land reform, but they (peasants/beneficiaries and their organizations) are not assumed to be omnipotent. On the other hand, the state is deemed a critical actor in any successful land reform too, but does not necessarily assume a commanding role. Meanwhile, for their part, markets are indeed an important context within which peasants who receive lands must be able to construct, maintain and sustain their livelihoods, but markets are not the only factor in economic productivity-enhancement issues. Although the state/society-driven perspective recognizes the relevance of each, it analyzes state, peasant movements, and market forces not as separate entities, but as interdependent ones, *inherently linked* to one another by their association to the politics and economics of land resources. Consequently, this view has three key dimensions: ‘*poor people-initiated*’, ‘*livelihood-enhancing/creating*’, and ‘*state-supported*’.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a few examples, refer to World Bank (2003) and Deininger (1999); for critical views on this approach, see among others, Barros, Sauer and Schwartzman (2003), Borras (2003a, 2005), Lahiff (2006) and Deere and Medeiros (2005); see also Carter and Mesbah (1993).

<sup>13</sup> For relevant discussions, refer to Rosset (2006), Veltmeyer (2005) and Petras (1997), but see also de Janvry, Sadoulet and Wolford (2001). It is to be noted that most advocates of this view refer to several Latin American examples or ‘models.’

<sup>14</sup> The concept of this ‘tripod’ framework in looking at agrarian reform draws partly from Borras, Kay and Akram Lodhi. I would like to acknowledge the ideas shared and suggestions made by Terry McKinley of UNDP in developing this framework.

If land reform and rural poverty eradication are issues that directly concern the rural poor, then, as emphasized by the 2001 Rural Poverty Report by IFAD<sup>15</sup> and at the recently concluded meeting of the Farmers' Forum at IFAD in February 2006 (see *Box 2*), it is the rural poor themselves who must get organized and mobilize to assert their rights. External state and non-state actors can play only secondary, facilitative roles, however important these may be. Yet, since land reform fundamentally requires the redistribution of land-based wealth and power, any successful and meaningful land reform must be state-supported. Only state power is authoritative enough to compel affected actors to obey institutional rules on redistributive reform. Finally, whether lands are gained by rural households through mass mobilization 'from below' or by autonomous actions by the state 'from above', peasants are always embedded within various types of input and output markets. Thus, any successful land reform should assist peasants in improving their labour and land productivity so that they may be able to attain the autonomy and capacity to construct, maintain and sustain their livelihoods, pursue, expand and deepen the exercise of their citizenship rights, and protect and preserve their cultural collective identity and heritage.

These insights concerning state, market and civil society have been, to a large extent and varying degrees and manifestations, validated by the lessons from the relatively significant work by IFAD around land issues over time. The study prepared by Hopkins, Carpano and Zilveti (2006) is especially interesting and useful because it actually devised a mechanism to determine the likely extent of IFAD's investments in and/or support for land-related development projects (for Latin America and the Caribbean for this particular study), which is one persistent information or data gap about development assistance or investments of international development institutions. In the context of IFAD's work they have counted and concluded that IFAD's actual land-related work is far greater and more widespread than previously believed or officially reported (for details and other relevant insights from this study, see *Box 1*).

Meanwhile, a recent overview paper prepared by Hollinger and Weigelt (2006) focused on how to strengthen IFAD's capacity to enhance access to land by the rural poor. The authors found that IFAD's work on land-related projects over time and across continents, in addition to reiterating the relevance of land in rural poor people's livelihoods made in previous assessments of IFAD-funded projects, also validated the importance of focusing attention on the interaction between the state, market and civil society. The extent of IFAD's work around land and water issues to date on the one hand, and the degree of interest in such issues among IFAD's civil society and governmental partners at the international, national and local levels on the other, requires a more systematic and coherent guideline on pro-poor land policies within the institution. This need is highlighted by the Hollinger and Weigelt 2006 report. The 'tripod perspective' on agrarian reform, i.e. 'poor people-initiated, state-supported and productivity-promoting' as elaborated above, broadly captures IFAD's current take on this policy question. It can be a useful analytic handle for possible future undertakings on policy systematization around land and water issues within IFAD.

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<sup>15</sup> IFAD (2001).

### **Box 1: Empowering the Rural Poor Through Access to Land: Lessons from IFAD**

IFAD's mission as a specialised financial organisation of the United Nations is to reduce rural poverty. Access to land is one of the strategic objectives of the Fund. The Fund regards the lack of access to natural resources and productive factors such as land, water, and forests as one of the most important constraints leading to entrenched poverty.

Several IFAD projects address land tenure issues within major project components. In practice, however, IFAD has been doing much more on land issues than often acknowledged: a larger number of projects include activities on land tenure than officially registered. Projects include a variety of activities promoting a secure access to land: (i) land titling; (ii) demarcation and legal recognition of indigenous territories; (iii) land purchase; (iv) land rehabilitation; and (v) land interventions in the context of post-conflict situations.

Typically, these interventions facilitate the implementation of other components where clearly defined property rights are essential; and support national level policies on land issues often promoted by other major international donors. This complementary and supportive role of IFAD is also essential in being a source of learning on land tenure issues, and can be a useful ingredient in the design of national policies. IFAD has been paying greater attention to policy issues at national and international levels. This is reflected in the participation of the Fund in the creation of (and support to) the International Land Coalition.

Several lessons regarding the design and implementation of activities promoting secure access to land emerge from this study:

#### *Secure access to land is a strong source of empowerment of the rural poor*

Land is not only an asset and a source of income and wealth, but also a source of territorial identity and influence on local and regional institutions. This is in line with one of IFAD's main thrusts which emphasises the importance of empowering the rural poor by respecting their own organisations.

#### *The need for national policies supporting interventions at the project level*

The results of IFAD project interventions on land tenure issues have been highly influenced by government policies and the institutional set up. Heavy restrictions resulting from limited institutional capabilities, financial constraints and lack of political will to intervene on such issues have played a major role in limiting the success of some of the projects. There is a need for a realistic analysis on the institutional capacities of the implementing agencies.

#### *The key role of civil society organizations*

Working with regional or national civil society organisations is highly recommended as it facilitates dialogue with the government, supporting reforms oriented towards granting access to, or security over, land. As much as it is possible, projects should focus on strengthening existing local organisations. The involvement of civil society organizations is essential in order to put pressure on the effective implementation of these reforms.

#### *Building trust and long-term relationships*

An important factor in the process of land redistribution is the trust beneficiaries have in the institutions in charge of land-related activities. The legal recognition of indigenous territories requires a long process, and additional time is needed than that usually covered within a project cycle.

#### *Looking forward – mirando hacia adelante*

#### *A number of implications result from IFAD experience:*

(1) The high importance of supporting civil society organizations and small-scale producers in developing their understanding on various key aspects related to land tenure, property rights and rural institutions. (2) Specific measures need to be taken in order to ensure the policy consistency between national land policies and interventions at

the project level. (3) Ample room exists for joint activities and new types of partnerships between the various national and international organisations working on land tenure issues and property rights. These new alliances are crucial in influencing government policies.

**Source:** Hopkins, Carpano and Zilveti (2006)

That the persistent problem of lack of access to and/or control over land and water resources is directly correlated to rural poverty is not new, as discussed above. IFAD's perspective on this issue is also not an isolated or unique one. Most international development institutions since a few years ago have started to search for relatively coherent ways to embed their rural development projects or poverty reduction campaigns in land issues. The World Bank's *World Development Report 2005/06*, devoted to the issue of equity, following the earlier Policy Research Report on pro-poor land policies in 2003,<sup>16</sup> re-argues the importance of equity issues in poverty reduction initiatives. Seeking coherence and a more systematic approach to its rural development interventions in developing countries, the European Union in late 2004 made official a general guideline on land policies for developing countries. The British Department for International Development (DfID) has worked extensively and consistently on land issues, as have the German GTZ and the FAO as well. Co-financing development agencies (NGOs) such as the Dutch Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and the Oxfam-GB have also taken up land issues in the projects they are supporting worldwide.

There is no doubt that for various reasons there has been a significant increase in interest in land property rights reform among international development institutions. It is likely that such interest will even intensify in the coming years. The key question therefore is *not* whether these development agencies have included land in their official agendas. Rather, it is *how and to what extent* these institutions have included land in their official agendas, that is, whether based on an explicit anti-poverty framework or on purely economic efficiency considerations. Not all land policies officially labeled as pro-poor are indeed pro-poor. For example, many projects around formalization of private individual titles simply institutionalize the control by non-poor claimants over some public lands. Many of the 'land purchase' type of land policies do not, strictly speaking, favour the poor. Some of these policies and projects could even be said to be anti-poor.<sup>17</sup> The same policies might be relatively 'efficient', economically speaking; but economic efficiency is not the same as being pro-poor. While there is potential for combining the two concerns (anti-poverty and economic efficiency), in reality actual policy practice has been quite divided between them.

In other words, it is not simply a question of the *quantity* or frequency of land-related projects in an institution's investment or grant portfolio. Equally critical is the truly pro-poor *quality* of these development undertakings. Discussion and inquiry should go beyond looking for the mere presence or absence of land-related projects, to include critical examination of the actual pro-poor impact of such interventions. Likewise, inquiry should go beyond looking at the mere presence or absence of partner civil society organizations, to investigate what kind of constituency these organizations actually represent (or not) and the quality of support actually given to them. In this light, it is urgent and necessary that a more systematic interrogation of the actual records

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<sup>16</sup> See the World Bank Policy Research Report prepared by Klaus Deininger (World Bank, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g. Borras (forthcoming) and Borras (2003a).

(official promises versus actual delivery) of international (non/governmental) development institutions be carried out for the purpose of drawing comparative lessons.

Returning to the four main contending perspectives in land reform today, one observes that they are divided by some significant differences while also sharing some important similarities. All of them underscore the important role played by civil society organizations in land reform. One key difference, however, lies in the details of what is meant by the term civil society organization. Another has to do with what more precisely the role of such organizations ought to be. Revealing an underlying heterogeneity, differences in how to view the role of civil society organizations are also present between and within international (non/governmental) development agencies. This important insight provides the backdrop to the discussion that follows of key issues regarding the role of civil society in the advancement of a specifically poor people-initiated, livelihood-enhancing/creating, and state-supported 'tripod' agrarian reform framework.

## **Section 2: The Role of Civil Society in the Advancement of a Poor People-Initiated, Livelihood-Enhancing, and State-Supported Agrarian Reform Framework: Issues for Discussion**

A state/society perspective on pro-poor land policies and rural livelihoods framework is one that explains the dynamics of agrarian and rural change, especially poverty eradicating processes, by emphasizing the *interactions between and within* the state, civil society and the market.<sup>18</sup> Each of these entities is assumed to be highly heterogeneous in character. As such, each exists and behaves as both a 'single actor' and an 'arena of bargaining and negotiation'.

They are each single actors in the sense of bringing to bear a common set of (internally generated) features in viewing or dealing with other (external) institutions and actors in the processes of development and change. At the same time, each also constitutes a dynamic political arena in and of itself, comprised of many actors with varying, even competing or conflicting, interests; this is where (internal) bargaining and negotiations takes place. For instance, a large rural people's movement may be comprised of members from the rural proletariat, small owner-cultivators, share tenants, indigenous peasants, rural women or even rich farmers -- with competing and (at times) even conflicting short- and long-term interests regarding the terms of production and exchange relations. Or, a national government agency may be comprised of different currents and generations of officials -- with contending motivations and agendas, histories of recruitment into the bureaucracy, and so on, and who can be broadly categorized (in the context of land reform policy) into pro-reform and conservative (even anti-reform) currents.

Focusing on just one of these three categories of actors in isolation from the rest can lead to an ineffective development intervention, however well-intentioned or well-financed such development undertakings may be. Treating each as a monolithic entity can also lead to missed opportunities for constructive engagement, and consequently, ineffective development initiatives.

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<sup>18</sup> The various works of Jonathan Fox (e.g. 2005) have conceptually and empirically explained and demonstrated this broad framework as applied to rural-oriented policy reforms and poverty reduction campaigns.

Understanding the pro- and anti-reform policy currents within and between these three categories of actors, as well as how such varying currents interact with each other by complementing or undermining, facilitating or obstructing each other's initiative, can provide a better perspective on how pro-poor land policies could be implemented (or not). And such an informed perspective is needed, in turn, for any serious discussion of how civil society might become a more effective partner in this process. It is easy to declare state, civil society and markets as necessary actors for agrarian reform and rural development. But exactly *how* the involvement of each can occur in a positive way is not obvious. Focusing analysis and subsequent development interventions on the dynamic *interactions* (that include coalitions, dialogue, negotiations, consultations, bargaining, confrontation, shifting alliances) between and within different kinds of actors can lead to a better understanding of the policy process – and to the greater likelihood that the intended policy outcomes are achieved.

Most international (non)governmental donor agencies have stressed the crucial role played by civil society organizations, although what this really means can vary across agencies. As mentioned, IFAD has also emphasized the importance of promoting the role of civil society organizations in efforts to frame and implement pro-poor land policies and reduce rural poverty. To varying extents over time and with varying outcomes, IFAD has indeed promoted the role of different civil society organizations in project planning and implementation at the national and local levels. IFAD President Lennart Båge recently declared that, 'In pursuit of its mission to enable the rural poor to overcome poverty, IFAD's *first strategic objective* is to help strengthen the capacity of rural poor people and their organizations' (IFAD, 2005).<sup>19</sup>

At the international level, there are two major IFAD initiatives supporting or collaborating with civil society organizations. One is the recently convened Farmers' Forum, which is aimed at expanding and institutionalizing the role played by farmers and their representative organizations in the policymaking processes at IFAD, among others (see *Box 2*). Based on its official declarations, IFAD and the Farmers' Forum seek to expand the formal institutional space that farmers' organizations and their NGO allies occupy, in order to develop their own autonomous agendas while trying to influence official processes within IFAD. Interactions within the Forum, and between the Forum and IFAD, have so far been encouraging and promising. The extent to which the initial positive interactions can be sustained and deepened in the future depends on a number of factors, including the continued commitment of IFAD's leadership, as well as the extent to which IFAD is willing to tolerate demands for accountability, transparency and participation 'from below' and the extent to which civil society organizations are willing to navigate the limits and possibilities of the IFAD process.

Another collaborative initiative is the International Land Coalition (ILC), an international network of intergovernmental development institutions that includes IFAD and the World Bank, as well as NGOs. The ILC is another example of IFAD's efforts to enhance the role of civil society organizations in the pursuit of pro-poor land policies. It seeks to harness the potential synergies between NGOs and (inter)governmental organizations in order to help the poor secure access to land by forging formal coalitions or partnerships between them. The ILC has been replicating its coalition character at the national level, i.e. forging formal partnerships between its member NGOs and national government agencies.

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<sup>19</sup> IFAD's short document, '*IFAD and NGOs: Dynamic Partnership to Fight Rural Poverty*' (IFAD: n.d.) provides a useful overview on the Fund's view on partnership with NGOs.

IFAD also supports other autonomous initiatives of civil society organizations, including, for example, the NGO Parallel forum at the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) in Brazil in March 2006. Its financial support here, through the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty, a broad coalition of various peasant organizations and NGOs working on food issues, is unconditional. That is, it provides logistical assistance without imposing its own priorities in the framing of the NGO Parallel Forum's agenda.

### **Box 2: Farmers' Forum at IFAD**

*The Farmers' Forum will be:*

(i) an ongoing, bottom-up, process – not a periodic event – spanning IFAD-supported operations on the ground and policy dialogue; (ii) a tripartite process involving farmers' organizations, governments and IFAD; (iii) a space for consultation and dialogue focused on rural poverty eradication; (iv) an instrument for accountability of development effectiveness, in particular in the area of empowerment of rural poor people and their organizations; and (v) an interface between pro-poor rural development interventions and the process of enhancing the capacity of farmers' and rural producers' organizations (including organizations of artisanal fishers, pastoralists, landless workers and indigenous peoples).

*The Farmers' Forum will:*

(i) Be guided by the principle of inclusiveness, pluralism, openness and flexibility; (ii) Build on existing forums where possible and avoid duplication in these cases; and (iii) Respect existing organizations and create new spaces where needed.

*Conditions:*

(i) The forum process will start with national-level consultations that will feed into regional or subregional meetings. The latter will then shape the content of the participation at the farmers' forum at the IFAD Governing Council. (ii) The forum process should feed into IFAD's governing bodies. (iii) The forum's success will depend on IFAD's capacity to enhance country-level consultation with farmers' organizations and contribute to their capacity-building needs. (iv) Participants recommend, in particular, institutionalizing engagement with farmers' organizations in key IFAD operational processes (projects, and country and regional strategies).

**Source:** IFAD (2005: iii-iv), Workshop concluding statement.

### **Excerpts from the Synthesis of the deliberations at the Farmers' Forum (February 2006)**

#### *On IFAD-Supported Operations*

Partnerships between IFAD and farmers' organizations span strategy development and investment programmes. It was recommended that farmers' organizations participate – and in all cases be at least consulted – in the development of IFAD's strategies at both the national and regional levels. Farmers' organizations should be systematically involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes and projects, financed either through loans or grants. Similarly in each of its intervention, IFAD should allocate specific direct funding for rural organizations to, independently, evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its interventions.

#### *On the Farmers' Forum Process*

Participants confirmed their engagement with the Farmers' Forum as an on-going bottom-up process, a space of consultation and dialogue on rural poverty reduction. It respects existing organizations, their diversity and

autonomy and does not create parallel structures.

The Farmers' Forum cycle 2006-2008 will comprise a significant number of national consultations in each region, to be fed into regional or sub-regional for a, before the 2008 [IFAD's] Governing Council [Meeting]. The planning of these consultations should be elaborated region per region together with regional and international organizations. Coordination with other international agencies, in particular with FAO, would strengthen the process of the Forum and minimize the demands on the time and resources of farmers' organizations.

The interface of the Farmers' Forum and IFAD's Governing Council must be institutionalized.

The participants of the Forum proposed the development of an agreed-upon code of conduct to guide interactions and partnerships between farmers' organizations and IFAD.

**Source:** Farmers' Forum Joint Declaration, 14 February 2006, Rome.

Is this picture of international development institutions and their partnerships with civil society organisations amidst a bleak backdrop of problematic agrarian reform and rural development too rosy? If most development agencies and civil society organisations have indeed been doing what they are ought in pursuit of agrarian reform, why do land problems remain prevalent and still so far from being decisively resolved? Is it simply a matter of increasing the same types of interventions, or is critical reflection about both the quantity and quality of current initiatives by development agencies and civil society organisations alike warranted? This paper will now further problematise key concepts and current undertakings concerning civil society and its role in pursuing pro-poor land policies and eradicating rural poverty worldwide. The discussion which follows is organised along three sub-themes, namely: (i) civil society and the promotion of 'poor people-initiated' campaigns; (ii) civil society and the promotion of greater state support to agrarian reform and rural development; and (iii) civil society and the promotion of livelihood-enhancement or creation efforts. Key issues are tabled for discussion and reflection.

*(1) Issue for Discussion No.1: Civil Society and the promotion of 'poor people-initiated' campaigns*

Pro-poor land policies cannot be implemented fully or meaningfully without rural poor people themselves organizing and mobilizing to claim their rights over particular land resources. History has shown that even land reforms implemented via a 'top-down' approach by an authoritarian state on the one hand, or the 'willing seller, willing buyer' market-oriented land transfer scheme on the other, require active and widespread mobilizations by peasants themselves. More generally, however well-intentioned and well-funded, top-down development and livelihoods projects without strong 'co-ownership' by the poor tend to fail. This is true not only for small-scale community projects (e.g. the previous era of 'community development approach'), but also for many large scale development campaigns undertaken by some nation-states as well.<sup>20</sup>

A rural social movement's political strength can differ from one context to the next. At the national level, certainly, Brazil's MST, Bolivia's FNMCB-*Bartolina Sisa*, Mozambique's UNAC,

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<sup>20</sup> Such as those examined by James Scott (1998)

Indonesia's FSPI, and the Philippine's UNORKA, can all be considered 'strong' peasant movements. Yet upon closer inspection, they vary considerably from one another, and even internally. Each is involved in campaigning for land redistribution within very different historical and institutional contexts, and each is involved in innovating in livelihood alternatives and strategies. These differences matter. An understanding of any rural social movement must be based on the specific context within which it emerges and struggles for success and standing. If the concern of organisations like IFAD is how they might contribute further to strengthening or enhancing the power of rural social movements engaged in land issues, many of which remain fragile, it is useful to clarify some underlying issues.

### *Differentiating Civil Society Actors, Differentiating Spaces*

In order to be precise and effective, a development intervention to assist civil society organisations should at all times be conscious of the highly heterogeneous nature and character of civil society organisations based on their constituency, ideologies, strategies and levels of operation. Different types of civil society organisation have different roles to play in the development process in general or in a specific campaign for policymaking and implementation.

*Constituency.* It is crucial to distinguish 'people's organisations' (POs), from NGOs. The former pertains to associations by the rural poor themselves, that is, rural proletariat, small owner-cultivators, share tenants, indigenous peoples, rural women and subsistence fisherfolk. The term NGO, by contrast, refers to various groups that usually play the role of intermediary between donor agencies and organisations of the rural poor, e.g. NGOs engaged in community organising, training and education, documentation or research, and lobbying. In addition, another kind of non-state actor involved in the development process is the academic and research institution (ARI). The PO-NGO distinction is crucial because in reality there are many farmers' associations that represent non-poor or even rich farmers, rather than the poor. If the purpose of a development intervention is poverty eradication, interaction with and support to organisations of the poorest of the poor (and not rich farmers) is warranted. Not knowing the type of constituency an organisation has, could result in development interventions that undermine, instead of support, the rural poor.

*Ideology and strategy.* Not all civil society organisations are willing to meaningfully engage other actors over reformist policy agendas, perhaps because they could not accept or are not willing to try to stretch the limits of existing policies. Some groups a priori view partnerships with (inter)governmental agencies in development projects as 'conflict-free', (inadvertently) 'depoliticising' the development process.<sup>21</sup> This type of group and interaction is not likely to make much impact, especially on policy questions that involve restructuring power relations. There are also civil society organisations that tend to be controlled and driven by the instrumental interests of elite leaders. They tend to view engagement with state and non-state actors in terms of what material benefits might be gained institutionally and personally. Neither of these extreme types of civil society organisation – whether a rural poor people's organization (PO), an NGO, or an ARI – are likely to be very useful for the rural poor in terms of ideology and strategy. They may even end up undermining the latter's interests and efforts, especially in the context of policies that are 'redistributive' in nature (e.g., involving a redistribution of wealth and power in society, such as land property rights reform).

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<sup>21</sup> The term 'depoliticizing development' is borrowed from John Harriss (2002); see his excellent book about critical reflection on the notion of 'social capital'.

The more relevant and effective type of organisation, by contrast, tends to be ideologically pluralist, politically pragmatic, organizationally robust, democratic, and accountable. This latter type tends to be conscious of the possibilities *and* limits of existing land policies, but would prefer to continue to struggle to explore the possibilities for stretching pre-existing boundaries. These are organisations that employ social mobilization ‘from below’ as a main strategy, however difficult. They give value to working and forging alliances with ideologically diverse groups and do not maneuver to impose their own dogmas. They have a clear constituency among the rural poor, with leaderships more likely to be accountable to members and a strong commitment to internal democracy. It is this latter type of civil society organisation that tends to be the most determined to pursue reformist pro-poor land policies, but whose autonomy and capacity – the two dimensions of organizational strength -- may need further enhancement.

*Level.* Finally, it is important to distinguish analytically between civil society groups in terms of level of organisation and influence. Civil society organisations and the role they play in promoting and struggling for pro-poor land policies can vary, often considerably, by their actual level of organisation and influence (e.g., subnational/local, national, and international/regional). Each actor located at a given level has a distinct role to play because the context for policymaking and the implementation of pro-poor land policies today are increasingly occurring simultaneously at multiple levels. Most of the organisations of the rural poor, however, remain localised, their actions isolated and scattered, resulting in less impact. There are also cases of international/regional or national networks that tend to have problematic connecting channels with local mass organisations. When looking at different groups, it is critical to examine closely their organisational thickness and breadth at multiple levels.

Meanwhile, civil society organisations need their own, autonomous ‘spaces’ to carry out tasks in the struggle for pro-poor land policies and sustainable livelihoods, where they can share experiences, bargain and negotiate, make plans of action, and formulate and articulate demands without fear of reprisal. It is useful to differentiate three types of space, namely, ‘internal’, ‘shared’, and ‘contested’. *Internal* space refers to that which is autonomously controlled by a particular group, e.g. peasant movements, for their own internal processes. Within this space, an organisation is transformed into an arena of action, where bargaining and negotiation takes place among a heterogeneous constituency. *Shared* space refers to that which is controlled by no single particular group, but instead is shared more or less collegially with other actors, whether several POs, NGOs and/or even international development institutions. *Contested* space refers to one traditionally controlled by a particular group, which is now contested by other groups asserting their right to inclusion. More importantly, these are spaces of interaction between different actors, where each aims to influence others and in the process it is also transformed. Due to short- and long-term institutional and personal differences in views and agendas, conflictive interactions become an inherent feature between and within these spaces.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> As mentioned, each type of civil society organization cited above could play a distinctly important role in pushing for pro-poor land policies. While it is ideal to have autonomous movements from the rural poor people themselves, there are many settings in the world today where, for various socio-political and historical reasons, these movements have not emerged or developed into robust movements – at least not yet. In such constrained settings, NGOs can and do play critical role in preparing the ground for the eventual emergence (or not) of people’s associations. Certainly this is the case in many parts of the world today, but especially in transition economies, transitional polities, and in many parts of Africa and in the Near East – take for example the case of Rwanda (see Liversage, 2003), arguably even in post-apartheid South Africa. In settings where both people’s movements and NGOs have emerged, the challenge is how to make their parallel initiatives and actions complement, not undermine, each other.

Perhaps the most fundamental way that external state and non-state actors could contribute to enhancing the autonomy and capacity of the rural poor is by being more conscious about the differentiated nature of civil society, and by providing differentiated support to these heterogeneous groups. The conventional undifferentiated view of civil society and the subsequent support to such an undifferentiated category has often undermined, not enhanced, the role of peasant movements in their pursuit of pro-poor land policies.

In light of the above, one issue of discussion for international development agencies thus is *whether and how and to what extent external state and non-state actors have been conscious of the highly differentiated nature of civil society, the highly differentiated institutional spaces that each of them requires, and the differentiated support that each of these groups necessitates?*

### *Dimensions of Organizational Power: Autonomy and Capacity*

For rural poor people's social movements (POs and NGOs) to become more effective actors in pushing for pro-poor land policies, they need to gain a high degree of empowerment. As Jonathan Fox (2005: 71) explains, 'power is often treated as an implicitly one-way capacity, but it is more usefully understood in terms of relationships. Empowerment involves changes in power relations in three interlocking arenas: within society, within the state, and between state and society.' In the context of rural poor people's claim-making initiatives for land rights, it may be useful to follow this analytic lead in distinguishing empowerment (actors' capacities) from rights (institutionally recognized opportunities). These 'two good things do not necessarily go together. Institutions may nominally recognize rights that actors, because of imbalances in power relations, are not able to exercise in practice. Conversely, actors may be empowered in the sense of having the experience and capacity to exercise rights, yet they may lack institutionally recognized opportunities to do so.'<sup>23</sup> These analytic insights are partly illustrated by the case of Mozambique, where a progressive land law was passed in 1997, but has since experienced difficulties in actual implementation (see *Box 3*).

#### **Box 3: The Mozambican Experience**

Much praise has accrued to the new Mozambican land policy as a result of the 'right' to register land rights acquired through land occupancy that was included within the new legislative framework. It remains the case, however, that a community that wishes to exercise this right must pay the costs involved. The 'right' therefore remains out of reach for the vast majority of rural communities.

Norfolk and Liversage (2001: 22)

Understanding how to enhance the power of the rural poor's associations requires an understanding of the dimensions of organisational power per se, namely, autonomy and capacity, as conceived by Jonathan Fox (1993) in the context of implementation of a state food programme in rural Mexico. Using Fox's approach, Jennifer Franco examined numerous farmers' organisations in agrarian reform communities in the Philippines in a series of two studies carried

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<sup>23</sup> Fox (2005: 71).

out by a consortium of Philippine non-governmental organisations under the auspices of an FAO programme.<sup>24</sup> The latter FAO-funded studies showed that much rural development assistance tended to proceed without proper regard for the organisational life that already existed or that would be required to ensure project success, and recommended that any future assistance be geared toward both autonomy-enhancing and capacity-promoting activities. Following Fox (and Franco), the term ‘autonomy’ refers to the degree of external intervention in the internal organizational processes (orientation, decision-making, actions, etc.) of an association, whether an NGO or a peasant movement organization. Autonomy is different from ‘independence’. The latter suggests an ‘either/or’ approach and tends to depict a rather static relationship (i.e., an association is either completely ‘independent’ from, or totally ‘co-opted’ by, state or non-state external institutions). But most cases fall somewhere in between the two. Thus, it is more appropriate to use the concept of autonomy, which is inherently *relational* and a *matter of degree* – ‘relational’ because it refers to the nature of the interaction between an association and state or non-state groups that are external to it (e.g. a national peasant movement organisation and its relationship to a nation-state, or to intermediary NGOs, or to international donor agencies). Being a ‘matter of degree’ means that such relationships are rarely a case of being either co-opted or totally independent. Rather, the reality is somewhere in between. In fact such a relationship is dynamic and constantly negotiated between these actors over time. A high degree of autonomy is necessary for an association to decide on its own whether and how and to what extent it shall pursue what type of pro-poor land policies. Having more autonomy entails a greater degree of power.

But even when it is highly autonomous, a peasant association may not be able to pursue its goals if it suffers from a low degree of capacity. ‘Capacity’ means simply the ability of an association to do what it wants to do. The meaning and features of capacity vary from one civil society organisation to the next. For a peasant association pursuing meaningful pro-poor land policymaking and implementation, capacity might entail having the logistical resources to be able to decide when and where to conduct their own general assembly, instead of having to rely on some NGOs or a government agency for such. To others, it might require having access to (para)legal services and assistance needed for their land claim-making initiatives, or to necessary technical knowledge in some farming systems such as intercropping, or even the ability to scale up very localized and small scale development projects. The kinds of capacity needed by an association depend mainly on the kind of constituency it has, the type of opportunities there are, and the objectives of development undertakings or policy reform campaigns.

However, the capacity-enhancing programs that are most important to civil society organisations, such as (para-) legal assistance, are not necessarily the ones prioritised by international development agencies. Even if a peasant association has attained a higher level of capacity – having accumulated the funds, skills and know-how to hold effective assemblies, or to access efficient legal assistance, or to deploy certain desirable farming techniques – their initiatives are still likely to have a limited impact if they have not attained a sufficiently high degree of autonomy from state or non-state external actors.

Ideally, most effective type of a civil society organization is the one that is able to maintain both a high degree of autonomy and a high degree of capacity. Today, most peasant movements campaigning for pro-poor land policies can be located somewhere in between the two opposite

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<sup>24</sup> The subsequent discussion here on autonomy and capacity draws from Fox (1993); for the specific application of this concept on land reform, the section draws from Borras (2001) and Franco (1998).

poles described here. Yet movements are never static, but marked by constant ebbs and flows of power (e.g., established movements may disappear even as new ones emerge; while ‘strong’ movements can weaken and contract and previously weak ones grow stronger). External interventions that aim at enhancing the role of civil society organisations in pursuit of pro-poor land policies must therefore simultaneously promote both dimensions of an organization’s power: autonomy and capacity.

There is an inherent tension here, because state and non-state (donor) agencies engaging civil society organisations on land issues may not always be comfortable in dealing with highly autonomous partners and might be tempted at times to try to control and limit (or depoliticise) the terms of interaction. Highly autonomous and capable civil society organisations should be able to regularly demand accountability from international development institutions for the latter’s official mandate and policies, without the risk of having financial support to them cut. It is partly because of this inherent tension that most development agencies tend to focus their support for civil society organisations on technical and non-politically contentious project development undertakings or depoliticised partnerships. These may not be problematic in and of themselves. What is problematic is when this type of development intervention is imposed on rural poor people whose most immediate need is for politically contentious reforms like land reform. Unfortunately, to date, logistical support for the more urgent socio-political undertakings of many poor people’s organisation, such as autonomous organisation-building and mobilizations to claim land rights, has remained intermittent at best.

The underlying issue is *not* whether state and non-state (inter)national development agencies should extend support to civil society organizations campaigning for pro-poor land policies (because in fact they do). Rather, it is *how and to what extent support by international development agencies including IFAD has actually contributed to enhancing the capacity and autonomy of civil society organizations*, including NGOs, academic and research institutions, and most especially, peasant movement organizations. If past support has not yet been carried out fully and meaningfully along this framework, then the question is: *how can such support be improved in order to make it more effective and far-reaching?*

### *Promoting Greater Vertical and Horizontal Interconnectivity*

Local rural poor people’s organisations are clearly extremely important in the pursuit of pro-poor land policies and sustainable livelihoods. They constitute a slice of associational life that many poor people can (and do) experience directly on a daily basis. Left on their own, however, these organisations can easily become isolated and weak. Local organisations need allies for several reasons, but generally in order to mobilise the resources needed to undertake collective action and to extend the political reach of their collective actions beyond the local. This is perhaps especially true when poor people are involved in such politically contentious campaigns as land policy reform and implementation. This is because key decision-making and administrative authorities are usually based in district centers and national (or in some cases, international) capitals, while the power of key opponents to such reforms often extends to these ‘higher’ levels of the system as well. It is in this context that local poor people’s associations need to forge horizontal and vertical alliances that will enable them to effectively expand and extent their political ‘reach’ beyond their immediate locale.

For example, one important campaign for policy reform is the transnational ‘Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform’, a joint undertaking by *La Via Campesina* and the Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN). This ongoing effort emerged from the realisation that national land policies are in fact increasingly and largely being (re)shaped by powerful forces at the international level. Among the campaign’s accomplishments to date are: i) bringing to the attention of the international public (very localized) violations of the human rights of peasants who mobilise to assert and claim land rights, ii) alerting national publics about how national land policy processes are being (re)shaped at the international level, and iii) developing new initiatives with the potential to alter the pre-existing institutional context for land rights claim making, such as lobbying for a Peasants’ Charter before the United Nations (For an overview of the general principles guiding this campaign, refer to *Box 4*).

**Box 4: The Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform by *La Via Campesina*, FIAN & LRAN**

In July 2000, peasant movement leaders and their allies, coordinated worldwide by *La Vía Campesina* and the Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) gathered in Honduras to discuss the prospects of redistributive land reform in the era of globalisation, as well as to examine the World Bank’s market-oriented land policy model. The organisations which took part in this forum adopted a political stand against the World Bank’s model, a position that would guide the policy positions and collective actions by their network members across continents in subsequent years. It is relevant to quote parts of their official declaration at length to help put into perspective the current stand on land policy issues by the numerous movements of landless peasants, small farmers, indigenous peoples, and rural women associated or identifying with *La Via Campesina* and its discourse:

*“Land provides the base for all human life. Land, appropriately called Mother Earth by the natives of the Americas, feeds us: men, women, boys and girls; and we are deeply bound to her... We therefore reject the ideology that only considers land as merchandise. We observe with concern that the dominant agrarian policies, implemented within the framework of neo-liberalism, increasingly attempts to subject Agrarian Reform to the mechanics of the land market. We see that the states and international organisations implement policies that end up privatising the Agrarian Reform process, which in many countries have resulted in counter agrarian reforms and a scandalizing re-concentration of land ownership within a few hands. We also observe that international financial institutions, particularly the World Bank, promote a model called ‘market-assisted agrarian reform’ that according to our experiences threatens and substitutes existing Agrarian Reform programmes. The neo-liberal dogma, in essence, contradicts the basic principle of Agrarian Reform. According to its defenders, land is no longer for those who work it; but is kept for those who own the capital to buy it. The application of this principle systematically excludes landless peasants from participating in economic development, and deepens the already existing poverty. We wish to assert that, when governments fail to keep their commitment to agrarian reform and just allow the market to govern the distribution of land, they violate the human rights of peasant families who need access to land to fulfil their right to feed themselves as well as other economic, social and cultural human rights...”*

(Vía Campesina, ‘Declaration of the International Meeting of the Landless in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, July 2000)

**Note:** In 2004, the Land Research and Action Network (LRAN) joined the campaign

**Source:** Borrás (2004)

Horizontal alliances entail forging solidarity networks or partnerships with their counterparts in other localities who share similar concerns. Vertical networks enable local peasant

organizations to forge linkages with other groups at the higher levels beyond their village. These linkages are critical components of civil society building process. It is in them that organisational dynamics emerge and develop (or not) with respect to important political issues such as representation, accountability, information flow. That the critical linkages between organizational levels are actually working is *often more assumed than actually demonstrated*. While much serious inquiry into them remains to be done, it is safe to assume that there are weak spots in trans/national civil society organisations and networks in this regard, and that a better understanding of the weak spots and how to address them is needed.

If it is to be useful, more consistent and coherent support for improving the institutional links is needed, and in the context of politically contentious campaigns like that on land policy reforms, quite urgent. Promoting initiatives aimed at enhancing greater interconnectivity and especially vertical accountability (subnational-to-national and national-to-international levels) is crucial. If done well, this may help prevent the not-so-promising situation where, on the one side, there are scattered and isolated local civil society actors (with a strong tendency to be organised strictly around donor-funded local projects) and, on the other side, there are international networks without clear connections to local and national levels (with a tendency to become too ideologically-driven). Strengthening the vertical and horizontal linkages between and within civil society organisations entails the institutionalisation of real accountability and effective representation mechanisms between and within them.

Consequently, an important issue for reflection is *how and to what extent development agencies, including IFAD, have effectively supported strategic programmes or spaces aimed at strengthening the critical links between the various levels of civil society organization-building. What are the possibilities and limits in this regard of the current initiatives of IFAD as well as other agencies?*

## (2) Issues for Discussion No. 2: Civil society and the promotion of livelihood-enhancing/creating land reform

Land reform can potentially be exclusionary, benefiting the relatively better-off and non-poor, rather than the rural poor. Often, it is women, farmworkers and indigenous communities that are effectively excluded. Livelihoods that subsequently emerge from land reform processes for some, can also mean the subsequent loss of livelihoods for others. Hence, there is an urgent need to ensure that the character of land policies is inclusive and truly pro-poor.<sup>25</sup>

For the rural poor, in order to have the autonomy and capacity to construct, defend and sustain livelihoods, they need to have access to five types of capital assets: produced human, natural, social and cultural.<sup>26</sup> Access to resources is, as Bebbington (1999: 2022) pointed out in his study of rural livelihoods in the Andes, ‘perhaps the most critical resource of all if people are to build sustainable, poverty alleviating rural livelihoods.’ This formulation puts into context the importance of redistributive land reform in the construction, maintenance and expansion of rural

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<sup>25</sup> Policy advocacy for and studies on land reform tend to focus on the lands and people that are actually included in the official policy. While references are made to the excluded lands and sections of the rural poor, the level of advocacy and inquiry is comparatively low. This has led to persistent gaps in the current understanding of the role of land reform in the construction of livelihoods by the rural poor. Refer to Borras (2003b).

<sup>26</sup> Taken from Anthony Bebbington (1999). For an elaboration of each of these capitals, see Bebbington (1999); but refer also to Scoones (1998) and Leach, Mearns and Scoones (1999).

livelihoods in developing and transition countries today. But these assets are not usually democratically controlled by or equitably distributed among people. Instead, the rural poor and their allies must mobilise in order to get access. Mobilisation necessarily entails ‘engaging with other actors through relationships governed by the logics of the state, market and civil society... and more importantly to change the dominant rules and relationships governing the way in which resources are controlled, distributed and transformed into income streams’.<sup>27</sup>

This brief reiteration of the fundamental concepts in recent thinking about rural livelihoods tells us that for a redistributive land reform to be successful, it has to be made an integral part of rural poor people’s initiatives to build and sustain their livelihoods. For the rural poor, this implies bringing the question of access to and control over land resources into their organized efforts to get access to and control over the other five capital assets. It is here that civil society groups and development agencies can play an important role in terms of helping create the conditions within which the poor can get access to these assets. A few issues can be raised in this regard.

#### *Civil society and the rural poor’s diversified livelihoods*

It is important not to conflate ‘agricultural’ with ‘rural’ livelihoods. The rural poor, including farmers, do not normally maintain only a single type or source of livelihood. In fact, most studies on rural household incomes over time have shown that non-farm and off-farm incomes have increasingly taken a larger proportion of rural households’ total income. Care must be taken to locate land reform in this context and not to romanticise the potential power of a small owner-cultivator (in their discourse, many civil society organizations tend to overstate, perhaps inadvertently, the capacity of small family farmers to sustain their livelihoods).

This means that while it is critical to help small family farms become more efficient and competitive, especially those (newly) created through a redistributive land reform, focusing assistance on only agricultural-related livelihoods development undertakings (projects or policies) is unlikely to significantly enhance the sustainability and viability of small family farms. This is mainly because the latter remain in vulnerable conditions with periodic external shocks in this sector, e.g. price fluctuations in the input and output markets, and so on. Livelihood diversification provides a greater capacity for the rural poor to endure external shocks. This entails greater agricultural and non-agricultural diversification initiatives. Maintaining several types of agricultural production (e.g. crops, livestock, and trees) is important. Diversifying into other non-farm livelihoods will also be critical. The latter may include livelihood activities and employment in the rural, peri-urban or even urban areas. There are also cases where land is necessary for poor people not in order to farm their own plot per se, but rather in order to gain access to more stable jobs in bigger, consolidated (contracted) farms.<sup>28</sup>

But to many rural poor households, livelihood diversification is not easy to pursue for various reasons. Often it requires information about the range of possible options. Such information is not always readily available to the poor. Most of the time livelihood diversification also requires acquiring new skills and technology, which, again, are not always easily available. It is here that civil society organisations and development agencies can play critical roles, by

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<sup>27</sup> Bebbington (1999: 2035).

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g. Borras and Franco (2005).

increasing rural poor people's access to the desired variables of information, technology and technical skills.

The issue for discussion here is: *how can the 'agricultural livelihood-centered' discourse be enriched by incorporating nonagricultural livelihoods themes? To what extent have civil society organizations and development agencies working on agrarian reform and rural development issues actually incorporated nonagricultural livelihoods into their programs, projects and policy advocacy?*

*Civil society and the poor people's mobilization to gain access to various capital assets*

The general lack of access of most rural poor households to the five types of capital assets has to a large extent caused their economic poverty and socio-political exclusion. The differential access to these assets by different people in the rural areas has resulted in rural inequality in wealth and power. In most rural areas of the world today, access to and control over land resources is a necessary but not sufficient condition for poor people to have sustainable livelihoods. Civil society organisations working on agrarian reform and rural development are confronted by the related task of supporting the rural poor's mobilisation to gain access and/or to build these assets.

Mobilising to gain natural capital may entail having to get (or protect) access to land and water resources. Assisting the poor in building human capital may require lobbying the state for pro-poor social policies, including in health and education. Assisting them in gaining or building their finance capital may entail both supporting civil society-driven enterprises and lobbying for policy reforms that affect credit or tax policies affecting the poor. Assisting in building their cultural capital may require actions by civil society that promote respect for cultural practices and diversity, or may require lobbying the state for the protection of diverse cultural heritage or traditions. Helping them to thicken their social capital may require civil society organisations to help in identifying individual contacts and group allies, both in society and within the state, that could support the rural poor's mobilisation to gain, build and consolidate their capital assets.

One problem with many land reform advocacy efforts has been that they are often 'too land-centered'. This is a concern addressed to both governments and civil society organisations. While the problem of land property rights reform is central in any agrarian reform, resolving the problem does not automatically result in livelihood-enhancing and/or livelihood-creating outcomes. *The question then is how and to what extent civil society organisations and development agencies, including IFAD, that have been working on agrarian issues, have been able to systematically go beyond the struggle for land access to incorporate the struggles to gain and initiatives to build other assets?*

*Civil society and the need to expand poor people's social capital*

In the context of assisting the rural poor pursue a livelihood-enhancing land reform, perhaps the most significant contribution that civil society and development agencies have made, and could make, is help build, expand and consolidate the 'social capital' (social networks, mutual

trust) of the rural poor.<sup>29</sup> But some types of social capital can be harmful to the poor, e.g. social capital by landlords used to oppose land reform, social capital by some bureaucrats used for corruption, and imposed social capital that are purely technical-oriented and devoid of power dimension (e.g. partnership around a project), are just some examples.<sup>30</sup> A useful, pro-poor social capital in the context of poor people's campaign for land reform are those that reduce the cost and risk of rural poor people's collective action, and reduce the degree of their livelihood vulnerability, among others.

### *(3) Issues for Discussion No. 3: Civil society and the promotion of state-supported campaigns for pro-poor land policies*

For public policies that require redistribution of wealth and power such as land reform, the role of the state becomes critical because it is a key source of political-legal authority that can demand and command compliance from affected actors, such as recalcitrant landlords. But so far the discussion here has tended to be one-way, that is, emphasizing how state and other non-state actors contribute to building the autonomy and capacity of civil society organisations, especially peasant movements. But civil society organisations can also play significant role in encouraging the emergence of reformers within (inter)national governmental agencies.

For the purpose of this paper, the term 'reformers' or 'state reformists' refers to those groups of government officials that are committed to carry out pro-poor land policies, and tolerate or even actively encourage and support autonomous mobilizations 'from below' by civil society organisations. Experiences in different countries have shown that agencies that have repeated interactions with civil society organisations tend to produce more pro-poor reformers than agencies which did not have any significant civil society interface (e.g. land reform ministries as compared to finance ministries). Different policy and political currents within agencies are more likely to remain in their latent condition as long peasant movements demanding pro-poor land policies do not actually directly engage them. It is through repeated state-society interactions that explicit policy and political currents (pro- and anti-reform) – both within the state and in civil society – are mutually strengthened and become increasingly visible.

But because state and civil society actors come from very different institutional contexts, and each has a different set of motivations and long-term agendas for promoting a land reform policy, *conflict* is an inherent feature of the interface. Pro-reform state and societal actors may realise however that they need one another if their agenda for land reform implementation is to be accomplished, and so they continue to interact, each trying to (re)shape and (re)influence the other. In the process of repeated conflict-ridden interactions, both are transformed over time (see *Box 5* for further related discussions). A key assumption here is that states and (inter)governmental agencies (like civil society organisations) are not monolithic. The state is both an actor and an arena of contestation different groups of officials, including reformers.

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<sup>29</sup> As demonstrated empirically by some scholars working around this issue, such as Bebbington (1999) in the context of the Andean region, and Jonathan Fox and John Gershman (2000) in the context of multilateral agencies rural projects in Mexico and the Philippines.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g. Harriss (2002) and Putzel (1997).

## *Promoting 'spaces' for state-society interactions*

Promoting 'spaces' for fruitful interactions between state actors and civil society, where there is room for bargaining, negotiation and joint planning, as well as confrontation and 'accountability sessions', is needed to promote state-supported campaigns for pro-poor land policies. Most opportunities for these kinds of interaction end up being informal and unofficial, and the terms of interaction are determined only during the encounter itself. As a result, both state and civil society actors tend to feel relatively 'freer' in such types of encounters despite (or perhaps because of) the relatively uncertain and unpredictable nature of the space.

### **Box 5: Conceptual insights on state-society interactions**

(i) Pro-empowerment institutional reforms are driven by mutually reinforcing cross-sectoral coalitions between state and society, grounded in mutually perceived shared interests; (ii) institutional reforms that appear to be enabling may not be; they need to be unpacked in terms of their actual coverage, depth, and empowerment effects; (iii) pro-empowerment enabling environments require synergistic package of policy reforms. Transparency, accountability, and participation reforms need each other and are mutually reinforcing; (iv) power sharing involves conflict; successful power sharing involves conflict-resolution mechanisms that can be made more successful through deliberative power-sharing institutions; (v) pro-reform cross-sectoral coalitions in favour of empowerment require pro-poor policymakers to invest their political capital in order to give potential civil society counterparts clear signals, tangible incentives to engage, and some protection from backlash; and (vi) to encourage an enabling policy environment for empowerment, support reformers with track records – and support them while they are in their current institutions.

**Source:** Jonathan Fox (2005: 84).

### **Empirical example of a mutually reinforcing state-society interaction**

From 1972 to 2005, 6 million hectares of land were officially reported to have been redistributed to three million peasant households in the Philippines, comprising nearly half of the total farmland in the country and two-fifths of the total agricultural population. Two-thirds of this partial but significant accomplishment in land redistribution were been achieved during the period of 1992-1998. The Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) during this period, Ernesto Garilao, explained the factors and conditions that led to such an accomplishment; he said:

*The civil society partners of the DAR [Department of Agrarian Reform] were given all the opportunities to penetrate the state agrarian reform apparatus, get into alliances with national and local DAR bureaucrats, and use legal and extralegal political action to assert and seek favourable resolution of issues, concerns and interests... Not all the agrarian reform partners fully utilized this opening. But [some particular organizations and movements] saw this democratic opening and maximized [their] gains...*

When reforms do not move as fast, it is easy to accuse government of lacking political will and sincerity, and other pejorative terms in the civil society cookbook. In many cases, reforms do not move fast because social pressure from the constituency is weak. Many have the mistaken notion that press releases and letters to the editor constitute sufficient social pressure... [P]easant social mobilization complemented by friendly media support is a more effective combination. State reforms are rarely won by state reformists alone. They are won... when the alliance between autonomous peasant organizations and state reformists is much stronger than whatever coalition of the anti-reformists within and outside government can mount.

**Source:** Ernesto Garilao (1999)

However, there are also some formalised and official spaces for interaction (sometimes loosely referred to as ‘institutionalised’ spaces or interface mechanisms). In most cases, the terms of interaction are pre-determined by one camp or the other, and the encounters usually observe regular schedules. Examples include officially mandated commissions or committees requiring representation and participation from grassroots organisations, such as ‘local development councils’ in most countries amid decentralisation and most of the PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers). While these kinds of spaces do present opportunities for poor people to push for their agendas, one potential problem is that they can become static and unable to capture evolving dynamics in the state-civil society relationship. Because of shifting alignments and the regular ebbs and flows of organisation, a movement that is already an ‘empty shell’ may continue to occupy a privileged seat at the table, while a newly emerging vibrant movement could not enter the gate, and so on. At times, official spaces can even end up being used as a conservative mechanism to stifle, rather than encourage, autonomous actions ‘from below’. When this happens, the space becomes exclusionary and less effective, and the rural poor can exercise either their ‘voice’ option (i.e. challenge to democratize and make accountable the processes and actors therein) or their ‘exit’ option (i.e. to abandon this particular space and seek for alternative spaces). If a vibrant state-civil society interaction in pushing for land reform is desired, it may be better (though more difficult) to maintain both types of spaces – informal/unofficial and formal/official – simultaneously.

Here, the key question is *not* whether (inter)national (non)governmental institutions have supported, or are willing to support, ‘spaces’ for state-society interactions. Rather, the more relevant issue is *whether and to what extent these agencies have supported both types of spaces and the processes therein, and not only the formal, official type. How can development agencies, in light of the above discussion, contribute to civil society organisations’ ongoing efforts to engage state and non-state actors, even when they fall outside the prescribed formal and official venues?*

#### *Securing legal institutional framework for pro-poor land policy campaigns*

New state land laws may emerge, but they are not self-interpreting or self-implementing.<sup>31</sup> Instead, land policy implementation is also a struggle over meanings – that is, how to interpret and implement the law. State laws are both the context and object of poor people’s collective actions to control land resources, and thus are of fundamental importance.<sup>32</sup> But the struggles to control the nature, pace and direction of reforms in legal institutions related to property rights vary from one setting to another. In one place the focus may be advocacy to get a progressive law on land reform on the books, while elsewhere it may be to repeal an existing conservative one, or to reform it so that its coverage is broadened or deepened. For rural poor land rights claimants, effective and timely access to relevant and appropriate legal and human rights literacy activities and (para)legal assistance and services can spell the difference between success and failure. *The question here is whether and how and to what extent development agencies have supported coherent efforts by civil society groups and even state reformers to expand rural poor people’s access to crucial legal and rights advocacy resources, in the context of the latter’s campaigns to push for land policy reforms?*

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<sup>31</sup> See the study by Franco (2005) based on the Philippine experience but with insights relevant to many settings elsewhere.

<sup>32</sup> Refer back to the arguments by Jonathan Fox (2005); recall the Mozambican experience as explained by Norfolk and Liversage (2001); but see also the explanation of Ben Cousins (1997) in the context of South African land reform.

### *Supporting reformers within government agencies*

In many countries, the ministries or agencies tasked to carry out land reform or other pro-poor land policies are usually not well-financed or politically influential. In such conditions, reformers within these agencies may be weak and isolated compared to their counterparts in civil society. A less motivated and less confident bureaucracy is also less effective, especially relation to such conflict-ridden processes as social justice-oriented land reform. Having allies in civil society at different levels, as well as in intergovernmental international development agencies, can lessen the feeling of isolation and weakness.

A perception that the land agenda is supported by a large international development community may, in some situations, be helpful in pre-empting or rolling-back anti-reform challenges, and may even recruit ‘fence-sitters’ within state bureaucracies into active reformism. A few relatively minor considerations that could nonetheless make a long-term positive impact are: (i) to support programs that encourage officials to undergo professional re-trainings in the multidisciplinary fields, especially those that value the role of civil society organisations (e.g. human rights literacy, development studies, development management), and (ii) to carry out regular exchange programs among reform officials and civil society organisations between different countries with varying experiences on state-civil society interactions.

### **Section 3: Concluding Discussion and Challenges Ahead**

In summarizing the key ideas about state-civil society’s mutually reinforcing interactions, Table 2 provides a useful typology (‘ideal’ type analytic constructs) of the various possible conditions of state-society interactions – both for land redistribution campaigns and post-land transfer farm development undertaking. Type A involves state and societal actors pushing for positive land reform outcomes through mutually reinforcing interactions. The effectiveness of this approach has been demonstrated in successful land campaigns in Kerala and West Bengal (India), in Mexico in the 1930s, Bolivia in the 1950s, Chile in the early 1970s, Egypt in the 1950s, among others, with significant albeit varying degrees of successes. Recently, in the 1990s, it has been experienced in the Philippines, although in comparatively lesser extent.<sup>33</sup> But this is not a static condition; changes in the political opportunity structure could end an era of reformism in a given setting, as happened in most of the cited cases.<sup>34</sup> Historically, the Type A scenario is not very common, but once such a condition is achieved, development agencies should contribute towards the consolidation and deepening of such a progressive coalition.

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<sup>33</sup> Refer to Herring (1983) for the Indian cases, Kay (1998) for the Latin American cases, El-Ghonemy (1990) for the Egyptian case, and Franco and Borrás (2005) for the Philippine case.

<sup>34</sup> Tarrow (1994: 54) defines political opportunities as ‘the consistent (but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national) signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form a social movement’. Tarrow (ibid) identifies four important political opportunities: access to power, shifting alignments, availability of influential elites, and cleavage within and among elites. The availability of all or some of these opportunities can create possibilities that even the weak and ‘disorganized’ actors can take advantage of: conversely, even the strong grow weak.

Table 2: Dynamics of State-Civil Society Interactions

<p><i>Type B</i></p> <p>High = social mobilisations ‘from below’</p> <p>Low = state reformist initiatives ‘from above’</p>	<p><i>Type A</i></p> <p>High = social mobilisations ‘from below’</p> <p>High = state reformist initiatives ‘from above’</p>
<p><i>Type C</i></p> <p>Low = social mobilisations ‘from below’</p> <p>High = state reformist initiatives ‘from above’</p>	<p><i>Type D</i></p> <p>Low = social mobilisations ‘from below’</p> <p>Low = state reformist initiatives ‘from above’</p>

By contrast, the Type B scenario, where there is a high degree of mobilisations from below but low degree of autonomous state reformist actions from above, is not an uncommon one. Under certain conditions, it can result in significant reformist outcomes, as shown by the MST’s land campaign from the mid-1980s up to the present.<sup>35</sup> The more diffuse and amorphous types of everyday forms of peasant resistance and claim making can also qualify under this category, such as those in Vietnam and China in recent years.<sup>36</sup> When these conditions occur, it is best for development agencies to actively and directly support actions ‘from below,’ while investing as well in initiatives to encourage more state reformers to emerge. It is more likely that reformers will emerge where there is repeated engagement ‘from below.’

In the Type C scenario, there is a low degree of mobilisations from below but with high degree of state reformist actions from above. Such a setting may not be all that common in reality. Even those perceived to be top-down, state-conceived and state-driven land reform initiatives, such as the land reform in Peru in the late 1960s and early 1970s or the Chinese land reform in the

<sup>35</sup> Refer for example to Deere and Medeiros (2005).

<sup>36</sup> Refer to example to Kerkvliet (2005) for Vietnam, and O’Brien (1996) for China.

early 1950s, were in fact in direct reactions to earlier peasant mobilization for land. Perhaps the best example of this type of scenario, however, is post-World War II Japan, where land reform was essentially imposed from the outside, although once the reform got started, peasants increasingly mobilised more on their own. Another example might be the current Venezuelan state-driven land redistribution campaign.

Finally, the Type D scenario is where the degree of mobilisation ‘from below’ and initiatives ‘from above’ is similarly low. This perhaps best captures the situation in most developing and transition countries today. While there may certainly be pockets of mobilisation by peasants and their allies in these countries (and there seems to be evidence of increasing momentum in this regard at present), these have generally remained very uneven between and within countries. Here, the key challenge to development agencies is to assist in providing the conditions for autonomous mobilisations ‘from below’ to get started and emerge, while also providing support for state reformers to emerge and become entrenched. Support for legal institutional reforms may be especially relevant here. Actions and interventions by international development institutions in Type D settings can alter the pre-existing political opportunity structure, breaking the established pattern of inertia, and lead to unexpected positive outcomes.

In closing, some types of civil society organisations – i.e. highly autonomous and capable organisations of the rural poor and their allies – can play a positive role in carrying out far-reaching redistribution of wealth and power in a given society through agrarian reform. On their own, however, even the most robust civil society organisations can only achieve limited impact through their mobilisations ‘from below’. They need to forge broader alliances, including coalitions with state actors. Meanwhile, under certain circumstances reformers within (inter)governmental institutions can autonomously initiate reforms ‘from above’ that run counter to the interests of dominant social groups in society. But by themselves, they are also likely to achieve only a limited impact. The most promising condition, therefore, is when autonomous mobilisations ‘from below’ by peasant movements and their allies meet with autonomous reformist initiatives by reformers ‘from above’ within (inter)governmental institutions. It is this kind of mutually reinforcing interaction that is more likely to be able to overcome the considerable obstacles and constraints to redistributive agrarian reform, while taking advantage of the opportunities. The key challenge then is to locate support to civil society organisations within this context.<sup>37</sup> Such an intervention, however, is likely to be contentious politically, and so the most fundamental and difficult question remains: *how far can civil society organisations and development agencies alike, sustain or expand and deepen their support for rural poor people’s inherently contentious struggles for land and livelihood, involving redistributions of wealth and power in society?*

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<sup>37</sup> Refer to Table C in the *Annex*, for an initial attempt to capture in a summary format the highlights of the roles of state and non-state actors in the pursuit of agrarian reform.

## Annex

*Table A: Land Redistribution Outcomes in Selected Countries*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Total Lands Redistributed (% vis-à-vis total agricultural land)</b>	<b>Total Number of Beneficiaries (% vis-à-vis total agricultural Households)</b>
Cuba	since 1959	80	75
Bolivia	1952-77	74.5	83.4
South Korea	since 1945	65	77
Chile	1964-73	nearly 50	20
Taiwan	1949-53	48	48
Philippines	1972-2005	half	two-fifths
Peru	1963-76	42.4	32
Mexico	1970 data	42.9	43.4
Japan	1945 –	one-third	70
Syria	--	one-third	--
Ecuador	1964-85	34.2	no data
El Salvador	From 1980 through 1990s	20	12
Venezuela	Up to 1979	19.3	24.4
Egypt	1952-61	10	9
Brazil	1964-2002	6	11.3
Costa Rica	1961-1979	7.1	13.5
South Africa	1995-2000	1.65	2.0

**Source:** Borras (2006)

Table B: Changes in the Economic and Socio-Political Bases of, and Imperatives for, Land Reforms

Pre-1980s Period	1990s Onward
<b>Economic</b>	
Existing large landed estates are economically inefficient and must be re-structured through land reform	Continuing relevance/currency
Creation of privatized and individualized landed property rights in order to boost investments in the rural economy	Continuing – and has seen greater expansion in coverage  Issues related to inefficiency (and accountability) in (former) socialist state farms and cooperatives, e.g. Eastern Europe, central Asia, Vietnam, China  Issues related to efficiency in farm collectives brought about by past land reforms, e.g. Mexico and Peru
<b>Socio-Political</b>	
De-colonization	While to a large extent it is not a burning issue with the same intensity as decades ago, decolonization process-related issues have persisted in many countries, such as Zimbabwe
Cold War	Not anymore
Central state’s ‘management’ of rural unrest usually instigated by liberation movements	Diminished substantially as liberation movements waned. But rural unrest persisted in different forms, usually not in the context of armed groups wanting to seize state power but to push for radical reforms, e.g. Chiapas, Brazil,
As a strategy to legitimize and/or consolidate one elite faction’s hold on to state power against another, e.g. Left electoral victories, military coup d’ etat.	Continuing, e.g. Zimbabwe, tenancy reform by the Left Front in West Bengal
As an integral component of the central state’s aspiration of ‘modernization’, i.e. standardized cadastral maps, etc. for taxation purposes, etc.	Continuing, and has seen unprecedented degree of technological sophistication (e.g. satellite/digital mapping, computerized data-banking)  i) Post-conflict democratic construction and consolidation, e.g. post-apartheid South Africa, post-civil war El Salvador  ii) Advancement of knowledge about the distinct rights of indigenous peoples  iii) Advancement of knowledge about gender-land rights issues  iv) Greater concern about the environment  v) Persistence and resurgence of violence related to drugs and ethnic issues  vi) Emerging ‘[human] rights-based approaches’ to development  vii) The phenomenal rise of NGOs as important actor in development question at the local, national and international levels  [Can it become a real, important component of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) campaign worldwide?]

This table is a revised version of that in Borras, Kay and Akram Lodhi (2005).

Table C: Challenges to civil society and state actors in the pursuit of a poverty-reducing agrarian reform

Levels	POs (People's Organizations)	NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations)	ARIs (Academic and Research Institutions)	GOs (Governmental Organizations)	IDIs (International Development Institutions, governmental & nongovernmental)
<b>Poor people-initiated campaigns</b>	Building highly autonomous, highly capable associations of the poor -- from below, scaling up; organizationally robust, ideologically pluralist & politically democratic groups capable of representing diverse sectors & interests among rural poor; accumulate direct power via mass base-building from below. Contributing towards building 'autonomous spaces' for pro-reform interactions between POs, NGOs & ARIs on the one side, and GOs on the other side.	Building highly autonomous, highly capable NGOs that are ideologically pluralist & politically democratic & are committed to support the emergence, development & consolidation of autonomous organizations of the rural poor; committing to respect autonomous 'spaces' of POs; becoming dedicated allies of the rural poor & their organizations. Actively contributing to the construction of 'autonomous spaces' for direct & pro-reform interactions between POs, NGOs & ARIs on the one side, and GOs on the other side.	Developing highly autonomous, cutting-edge research initiatives & networks that are directly & immediately relevant to the struggles of the rural poor & their organizations; carrying out 'critical-but-sympathetic' researches & analytic engagements with POs & NGOs that are directly involved in the struggles for agrarian reform & sustainable rural livelihoods. Developing programs that are partly aimed at strengthening researches, & analytic & articulation capacity of POs, NGOs & reformers in governments.	Legislating pro-poor land laws &/or implementing existing ones. Respecting, protecting & promoting democratic rights of civil society; helping create and/or respecting autonomous 'spaces' for civil society. Helping construct & respecting 'autonomous spaces' for dynamic pro-reform inter-actions b/w state actors on the one side and POs, NGOs & ARIs on the other. Consolidating reformers among state actors by building their autonomy & capacity.	Providing greater, consistent, coherent & direct logistical, institutional & political support for autonomy-promoting & capacity-enhancing programs involving principally POs, but also NGOs, ARIs & reformers in GOs; esp. programs that are able to capture the dynamics (ebb & flow) of civil society building. Helping promote 'autonomous spaces' for civil society, especially POs -- but also 'spaces' for direct engagements & interactions between POs, NGOs & ARIs on the side and GOs on the other side.
<b>Livelihood-enhancing</b>	Mobilize to gain access to and/or build the five different types of capitals: finance, human, natural, social and cultural; build the autonomy and capacity to diversify livelihood sources and strategies.	To provide systematic assistance to the rural poor people's struggles to gain access to and/or build the five capital assets; provide assistance (project level and policy level) for livelihood diversification of the poor. Help build social capital of and for the poor in order to gain access to other capital assets.	To launch innovative research that could further our understanding about the dynamics of these five assets and the process of securing them; more empirical studies on possibilities and limits of diversified livelihoods.	Create enabling policy environment that could provide better conditions for the rural poor to gain access to and/or build the five assets; refrain from passing laws or entering into international treaties that could harm the rural poor's capability to access these assets and construct diversified livelihoods.	To provide systematic assistance to the rural poor people's struggles to gain access to and/or build the five capital assets; provide assistance (project level and policy level) for livelihood diversification of the poor.
<b>State-Supported</b>	Passing enabling policies and ensuring political conditions that could encourage the rural poor to mobilize in order to gain access to an/or build the five types of assets, but most especially land and water.	Lobbying governments to pass policies and create political conditions so that the poor could launch collective actions in order to secure access to these capitals; actively assist in building and expanding the social capital of the rural poor in the state-society linkage.	More autonomous researches about the importance of state-support in making sure that the rural poor could gain access to these capital assets, especially land and water resources.	Taking the key role in maintaining state support to pro-poor policies. To pass progressive land and water rights laws that call for the redistribution of wealth and power in society.	Support the initiatives by both the civil society and governments that strengthen the role of the state in general and by reformers within it in particular in pursuit of poverty-reducing agrarian reforms.

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