LAND REFORM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THE ROLE OF THE STATE AND OTHER ACTORS

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Summary

An approach to sustainable and equitable development requires well informed, purposeful courses of action by the state and other concerned social actors. Land tenure institutions have to be continually adapted and regulated to serve the "public interest". But unless the institutions and policies regulating rights and obligations in access to land are somehow made primarily accountable to poor majorities, to low-income minorities and unborn generations—instead of to currently dominant corporate and other powerful groups—"public interest" can easily be interpreted to mean the opposite of sustainable development.

A review of twentieth century land reforms in Latin America and in a few other developing countries is instructive, as it brings out several of these controversial issues. Each case is to some extent unique, but there are also common features permitting qualified generalizations. Land reforms are considered to have occurred in countries where more than approximately one fifth of the agricultural land has been redistributed to benefit over one tenth of the rural poor, over a period of a decade or less.

Social movements with important peasant support led to revolutionary regimes implementing significant land reforms in Mexico, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua. Similar processes produced massive land reforms in China and Viet Nam. Popularly based insurgencies in Peru and El Salvador convinced nationalist military officers wielding state power to undertake land reforms. Important land reforms by authoritarian regimes in South Korea and Taiwan had partially similar origins. Democratically elected regimes in Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Venezuela and Chile all initiated important land reforms. Political parties in each of these cases sought increased electoral support from low-income rural voters as well as being pressured by a wide range of other clients and allies with frequently conflicting interests in reform. In all of these reforms, peasant organizations and the state regime of the moment were central actors.

The often fleeting nature of popularly based state regimes supporting serious agrarian reforms is well illustrated by the Latin American experiences. In Mexico the most sweeping phase of the reform occurred during the Cardénas administration in the 1930s, with state-encouraged militant support by armed peasant organizations. Credit, marketing, technical assistance and similar state institutions were created or redirected to serve reform beneficiaries' needs. This resulted in significant increases in peasant food production and incomes. Subsequent administrations after 1940 continued to redistribute land, but priorities were changed to promoting commercial production by large-scale private farmers while leaving the peasants as dependent clients of the state's ruling party. In Bolivia, peasant food production and consumption increased following reform, but the marketed surplus diminished. The state was able to meet growing urban demands for food through highly subsidized imports. It directed most investments in agriculture toward private commercial producers in frontier regions while neglecting the mostly indigenous peasantry that had benefited from the land reform. Land reform had brought substantial benefits to major low-income peasant populations in both cases, but subsequent changes in the state's major political support groups, and hence its priorities, had excluded most peasant producers from playing a dynamic role in post-reform developments.

The Puerto Rican reform accompanied the protectorate's full integration into the US economy. Sugar exports lost their historic importance, while food imports increased rapidly. The house and garden plots allocated to many thousands of reform beneficiaries, however, provided a cushion that enabled rural workers to migrate to other employment on the island or in the United States on better terms than would have otherwise been the case. They were also politically very popular. Land reform in Venezuela was instigated in response to peasant protests, but its reliance on paying full compensation to expropriated large holders illustrated the limitations of a "market friendly" approach in reforming rural social relations.

The initially very successful Guatemalan reform was aborted by a United States-instigated military coup in 1954 with disastrous consequences for the country's future. The United States had supported the Chilean land reform timidly begun by the Alessandri regime and rapidly extended under the Frei administration, but its opposition to the Allende administration resulted in the coup that halted and partially reversed these earlier reforms. United States support had been decisive in promoting land reforms in South Korea and Taiwan, as well as in El Salvador. But United States opposition to the Sandanista regime in Nicaragua eventually led to a government that placed its priority on promotion of large-scale agro-export production by transnational investors and commercial private farmers who were mostly not reform beneficiaries. In Cuba, the United States trade embargo imposed in the early 1960s negatively affected production and incomes of land reform beneficiaries, but this was offset by liberal support from the Soviet Union until 1989.

Obviously, international markets as well as the policies of foreign powers and transnational corporations have crucially influenced the courses of these and most other land reforms. In rapidly globalizing national economies, this is likely to be even more the case in the future than it has been in the past.

Some analysts have concluded that growing globalization of finance, markets, information, production and modern technologies have left the redistributive land reforms of the past irrelevant for today's developing countries. Social differentiation of their rural populations have already advanced so far that it would be impossible to redistribute land rights in a way that could benefit most of the rural poor, according to this view. The difficulties experienced during the Chilean and Peruvian reforms of building a consensus among potential beneficiaries about how expropriated lands should be divided would seem to support this conclusion. The rural poor, they believe, will have to wait until livelihoods become available in other activities. Meanwhile, some might be helped by market-assisted land reforms that promote voluntary sales of land by large holders to low-income buyers who use the land more "efficiently". The majority of the poor who could not benefit from such real estate transactions could be tided over by social "safety nets" and emergency aid until they find other sources of income.

Fortunately, this pessimistic vision is not universally shared. Redistributive land reforms can still play a crucial role in relieving rural poverty and in promoting broad-based sustainable development. Increased social differentiation and other concomitants of globalization present new opportunities for significant reforms, as well as obstacles. Contradictions among large landowners about the costs and benefits of reform are increasing. Peasants have new opportunities to communicate

and organize with access to modern transport and communication facilities. They are now in a better position than earlier to find allies among environmentalists, groups promoting human rights and others in civil society as well as from international organizations committed to the promotion of equitable and ecologically sustainable development. Popularly based development strategies that include radical land reforms are not necessarily becoming obsolete. The problem is to organize the social forces able and willing to support them.

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Résumé

Une approche d'un développement durable et équitable nécessite des études objectives d'action par l'Etat et les autres acteurs sociaux concernés. Les institutions du regime foncier doivent être continuellement adaptées et ajustées pour servir "l'intérêt public". Cependant, à moins que les institutions et politiques régissant les droits et obligations à l'accès à la terre ne se montrent responsables envers les majorités pauvres, les minorités à faible revenu et les générations à venir, plutôt qu'envers des sociétés dominantes et autres groupes de pouvoir; "l'intérêt public" peut être aisément interpreté comme signifiant l'opposé d'un développement durable.

Un examen des réformes agraires qui ont été appliquées en Amérique latine et dans quelques autres pays en développement au cours de ce 20ème siècle est très instructif, car il révèle plusieurs points de controverse. Chaque cas était dans une certaine mesure unique, mais il y avait aussi des traits communs permettant une certaine généralisation. Les réformes agraires ont soit disant été appliquées dans des pays où plus du cinquième de la terre agricole était redistribuée au bénéfice de plus d'un dixième de ruraux pauvres durant une période de dix ans ou moins.

Des mouvements sociaux avec un soutien paysan important ont conduit à des regimes révolutionnaires qui ont mis en oeuvre d'importantes réformes agraires au Mexique, en Bolivie, à Cuba et au Nicaragua. Des processus similaires amenèrent des réformes agraires massives en Chine et au Viet-Nam. Des insurrections populaires au Pérou et au Salvador ont convaincu les officiers militaires nationalistes au pouvoir d'entreprendre des réformes. D'importantes réformes agraires par les regimes autoritaires de la Corée du Sud et de Taïwan ont en partie les mêmes origines. Des regimes démocratiquement élus à Porto-Rico, au Guatemala, au Venuzuela et au Chili ont tous initié d'importantes réformes agraires. Dans chacun de ces cas, les partis politiques virent le soutien électoral des travailleurs ruraux à faible revenu augmenter, mais subirent parallèlement la pression d'une large catégorie d'autres clients et alliés avec fréquemment des intérêts conflictuels dans la réforme. Dans toutes ces réformes, les organisations paysannes et les regimes en place étaient les acteurs centraux.

La fréquente nature éphémère des regime populaires soutenant de sérieuses réformes agraires est bien illustrée par les expériences latinoaméricaines. Au Mexique la phase la plus radicale de la réforme se déroula sous l'administration Cardénas dans les années 1930, l'Etat étant encouragé par le soutien militant des organisations paysannes armées. Crédit, marketing, assistance technique, et des institutions étatiques similaires étaient créées ou réorientées afin de répondre aux besoins des bénéficiaires de la réforme. Il en résulta chez les paysans, une augmentation significative de la production alimentaire et du revenu. Les

administrations successives après 1940 continuèrent la redistribution de la terre, mais les priorités avaient changé, en privilégiant la production commerciale de grande envergure de fermiers privés, tandis qu'elle laissait les paysans comme clients dépendant du parti au pouvoir. En Bolivie, la production et la consommation paysanne augmentèrent suite à la réforme, mais le surplus commercialisé diminua. L'Etat était en mesure de répondre à la demande alimentaire urbaine croissante, moyennant la subvention des importations. Il orienta la plupart des investissements dans l'agiculture par le biais de producteurs commerciaux privés dans les régions frontières tout en négligeant la paysannerie indigène qui avait bénéficié de la terre grâce à la réforme agraire. La réforme agraire avait dans les deux cas apporté des bénéfices substantiels aux populations paysannes à faible revenu, mais les changements importants au sein des principaux groupes de soutien politique à l'Etat et donc ses priorités avaient exclu la plupart des producteurs paysans jouant un rôle dynamique dans les développements d'après-réforme.

A Porto-Rico, la réforme accompagna l'intégration complète du protectorat dans l'économie américaine. Les exportations du sucre perdirent leur importance historique, alors que les importations alimentaires augmentaient rapidement. Les maisons et lopins de terre alloués à des milliers de bénéficiaires de la réforme donnèrent aux travailleurs ruraux la capacité de migrer vers d'autres emplois sur l'île ou aux Etats-Unis dans de meilleures conditions. Ils étaient en outre politiquement très populaires. La réforme agraire au Venuzuela a été mise en place en réponse aux protestations des paysans, mais sa confiance dans le payement d'une compensation complète pour exproprier les grands propriétaires montre les limites d'une approche d'un "marché amical" pour réformer les relations sociales en milieu rural.

La réforme guatémaltèque initialement très réussie fut sabordée par un coup d'Etat militaire commandité par les Etats-Unis en 1954, et dont les conséquences ont été désastreuses pour le futur du pays. Les Etats-Unis ont soutenu le démarrage timide de la réforme agraire chilienne par le regime Alessandri, et ont rapidement étendu leur soutien sous l'administation Frei; mais de leur opposition à l'administration Allende résulta un coup d'Etat militaire qui stoppa et inversa partiellement le processus de réforme engagé. Le soutien des Etats-Unis a été décisif pour la promotion des réformes agraires en Corée du Sud et Taïwan, comme plus tard au Salvador. Mais l'opposition américaine au regime sandiniste au Nicaragua conduisit par la suite à un gouvernement qui plaça ses priorités dans la promotion d'une production d'exportations agricoles à grande échelle par des investisseurs transnationaux et des propriétaires de fermes commerciales privées, qui n'étaient pas de grands bénéficiaires de la réforme. L'embargo commercial imposé à Cuba par les Etats-Unis au début des années 1960 a affecté la production et les revenus des bénéficiaires de la réforme agraire de façon négative, mais ces effets ont néanmoins été repoussés grâce au soutien de l'URSS jusqu'en 1989.

De toute évidence, les marchés internationaux tout comme les politiques des puissances étrangères et les sociétés transnationales ont influencé de manière cruciale le cours de ces réformes agraires comme bien d'autres. Avec la mondialisation rapide des économies nationales, il devrait en être encore plus le cas à l'avenir que ce ne l'a été par le passé.

Certains analystes ont conclu que la mondialisation croissante aux niveaux des finances, des marchés, de l'information, de la production et des technologies modernes ont rendu la réforme agraire redistributive telle qu'on l'a connu par le passé, inadaptée aujourd'hui pour les pays en voie de développement. Des différentiations sociales des populations rurales de ces pays se sont déjà développées de façon considérable et il serait impossible de redistribuer les droits à la terre de manière à en faire bénéficier la plupart des populations rurales pauvres. Les difficultés rencontrées pendant les réformes chiliennes et péruviennes, pour avoir un consensus parmi les principaux bénéficiaires sur la façon dont les terres expropriées pourraient être partagées, semblent appuyer cette conclusion. Ils pensent que les pauvres ruraux devront attendre jusqu'à ce que d'autres moyens d'existence deviennent disponibles dans d'autres activités. D'ici là, certains pourraient être aidés par un marché assisté de réformes agraires qui favoriserait volontairement la vente de terre par les grands propriétaires aux acheteurs à faible revenu, ces derniers pouvant l'utiliser de manière plus "efficace". La majorité des pauvres qui ne pourrait bénéficier de ce genre de transactions pourrait être dépannée par "des filets de sécurité" sociaux et par l'aide d'urgence, jusqu'à ce qu'ils puissent trouver d'autres sources de revenu.

Heureusement cette vision pessimiste n'est pas universellement partagée. La réforme agraire redistributive peut encore avoir un rôle crucial dans la lutte contre la pauvreté rurale, et dans la promotion d'un développement durable étendue à la base. L'augmentation de la différenciation sociale, ainsi que les autres aspects de la mondialisation offrent autant de nouvelles possibilités que d'obstacles pour des réformes significatives. Les contradictions parmi les grands propriétaires terriens à propos des coûts et bénéfices de la réforme sont en augmentation. Les paysans ont de nouvelles possibilités de communiquer et de s'organiser grâce à l'accès au transport moderne et aux facilités de communication. Ils sont aujourd'hui dans une meilleure position que dans le passé pour trouver des alliés parmi les défenseurs de l'environnement, les groupes de promotion des droits de l'homme et d'autres au sein de la société civile, aussi bien qu'à l'intérieur d'organisations internationales attachées à la promotion d'un développement équitable et écologiquement durable. Les stratégies de développement de base populaires qui incluent des réformes agraires radicales ne sont pas nécessairement devenues obsolètes. Le problème est d'organiser les forces sociales capables et ayant la volonté de les soutenir.

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Resumen

Para promover un desarrollo sostenible e igualitario se requieren estrategias resueltas y bien informadas por parte del gobierno y demás actores sociales involucrados. Las instituciones que rigen la tenencia de la tierra deben ser continuamente adaptadas y reguladas para servir al "interés público". Pero, a no ser que las instituciones y políticas que regulan los derechos y obligaciones en materia de acceso a la tierra sean hechas primordialmente para servir a las mayorías pobres, a las minorías de bajos ingresos y a las generaciones aún por nacer -en vez de favorecer a las corporaciones dominantes y a otros grupos con poder- el "interés público" puede fácilmente ser interpretado como lo opuesto a un desarrollo sostenible.

Un análisis de las reformas agrarias en América Latina y en algunos otros países en desarrollo refleja varias de estas controvertidas cuestiones. A pesar de que cada

caso ha sido único hasta un cierto punto, elementos comunes permitieron efectuar generalizaciones bien fundadas. En su mayoría, las reformas agrarias implementadas han ocurrido en aquellos países en los cuales más de un quinto de la tierra destinada a la agricultura fue redistribuida y benefició a más de un décimo de la población rural viviendo en condiciones de pobreza en el período de una década o menos.

Los movimientos sociales que contaron con un importante apoyo de los campesinos condujeron a los movimientos revolucionarios a implementar significantes reformas agrarias en México, Bolivia, Cuba y Nicaragua. Procesos similares han producido reformas agrarias masivas en China y Viet Nam. Insurgencias populares en Perú y El Salvador contribuyeron a que los oficiales militares nacionalistas que poseían el poder estatal llevaran adelante reformas agrarias. Las importantes reformas agrarias realizadas por los gobiernos autoritarios de Corea del Sur y Taiwan tienen, en parte, orígenes similares. Asimismo, los regímenes democráticamente electos de Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Venezuela y Chile iniciaron considerables reformas agrarias. En cada uno de estos casos, los partidos políticos buscaron mayor apoyo electoral en los votantes rurales con bajos ingresos, y, a la vez, fueron presionados por un amplio rango de clientes y aliados con intereses divergentes a la reforma. En todas estas reformas, tanto las organizaciones campesinas como el regimen estatal se convirtieron en actores centrales.

La frecuentemente efímera naturaleza de los regímenes populares que seriamente han apoyado reformas agrarias es propiamente ilustrada por las experiencias de América Latina. En México, la fase más importante de la reforma ocurrió en los años 30 durante la administración del Presidente Cárdenas, y contó con el apoyo de las organizaciones campesinas armadas, fomentadas por el Estado. Créditos, mercadotecnia, asistencia técnica y otros instrumentos similares propios del Estado fueron creados o redirigidos para atender a las necesidades de los beneficiarios de la reforma. Esto resultó en un aumento significante en la producción campesina de alimentos y en sus ingresos. Las administraciones que siguieron al año de 1940 continuaron con la redistribución de tierras, pero con prioridades tales como la de promover la producción comercial privada en gran escala, dejando a los campesinos como clientes dependientes del partido gobernante en turno. En Bolivia, la producción campesina de alimentos se incrementó luego de la reforma, pero el excedente vendido en el mercado disminuyó. El Estado consiguió satisfacer las crecientes demandas alimenticias urbanas gracias a importaciones fuertemente subsidiadas. Dirigió la mayoría de las inversiones en agricultura hacia la producción comercial privada en regiones fronterizas, descuidando al campesinado mayormente indígena que se había beneficiado con tierras de la reforma. En ambos casos, la reforma agraria había traído beneficios substanciales, en su mayor parte, a poblaciones de campesinos con bajos ingresos. Sin embargo, sucesivas presiones de los grupos de apoyo político más influyentes del Estado acarrearon un cambio en las prioridades de éste y resultó en la imposibilidad de los productores campesinos de ejercer un rol dinámico en los acontecimientos que siguieron a la reforma. La reforma de Puerto Rico acompañó a la completa integración de este protectorado a la economía de los Estados Unidos. Las exportaciones de azúcar perdieron su importancia histórica mientras que las importaciones de alimentos se incrementaron rápidamente. Las casas y terrenos asignados a miles de beneficiarios de la reforma proveyeron a los trabajadores rurales con un amortiguador que les permitió migrar, en mejores términos (dejando a sus familias

instaladas), a otros empleos en la isla o en los Estados Unidos. Las reformas también fueron políticamente muy populares. La reforma agraria en Venezuela fue instigada por las protestas de los campesinos. El hecho de tener que pagar compensación total a los grandes propietarios expropiados demostró las limitaciones de un enfoque orientado hacia el mercado en el cambio de las relaciones sociales rurales.

La reforma guatemalteca fue muy exitosa en sus comienzos, pero fue abortada por el golpe de estado instigado por los Estados Unidos en 1954, trayendo consecuencias desastrosas para el futuro del país. En el caso de Chile, los Estados Unidos habían apoyado tímidamente la reforma agraria iniciada por el regimen de Alessandri y continuada por la administración de Frei, pero la oposición al gobierno de Allende, que concluyera en el golpe militar que lo depuso, detuvo y parcialmente revirtió las primeras reformas. Por el contrario, el apoyo de los Estados Unidos fue decisivo en la promoción de las reformas agrarias en Corea del Sur, Taiwan y más tarde en El Salvador. A su vez, la oposición de los Estados Unidos al regimen Sandinista en Nicaragua llevó, eventualmente, a la formación de un gobierno que dio prioridad a la promoción de la producción agro-exportadora en gran escala de inversionistas transnacionales y granjeros comerciales privados, que en su mayoría no eran beneficiarios de la reforma. En Cuba, el embargo comercial norteamericano impuesto a comienzos de los años 60 afectó negativamente la producción y los ingresos de los beneficiarios de la reforma, aunque ésto se vio compensado por el apoyo liberal de la Unión Soviética hasta 1989. La extrema pobreza rural fue prácticamente erradicada y la educación y salud en las zonas rurales mejoraron rápidamente. Pero, el desmantelamiento de la Unión Soviética resultó en una severa contracción económica y crecientes dificultades.

Obviamente, tanto los mercados internacionales como las políticas de las potencias extranjeras y empresas transnacionales han influenciado crucialmente las orientaciones de éstas y la mayoría de las reformas agrarias. Y, con la rápida globalización de las economías nacionales, es factible que esta situación se repita en el futuro aún más de lo que lo ha hecho hasta ahora.

Algunos investigadores han llegado a la conclusión de que la creciente globalización de las finanzas, los mercados, la información, la producción y las tecnologías modernas han hecho de las reformas agrarias de ayer algo irrelevante para los países en desarrollo de hoy. De acuerdo con este punto de vista, hoy en día, en estos países las diferenciaciones socio-económicas de las poblaciones rurales han aumentado tanto que sería imposible redistribuir derechos legales sobre la tierra de manera tal que se pudiera beneficiar a la mayoría de la población rural pobre. Las dificultades experimentadas por las reformas chilena y peruana para lograr un consenso entre los potenciales beneficiarios de la reforma acerca de la manera en la cual las tierras expropiadas deberían ser divididas, parecieran apoyar esta conclusión. Se considera que las poblaciones rurales pobres deberán aguardar hasta que fuentes de ingreso alternativas sean disponibles. Mientras tanto, algunos pobres podrían beneficiarse por reformas agrarias centradas en el mercado, que promuevan las ventas voluntarias de tierras de parte de los grandes propietarios, a compradores de bajos ingresos que utilicen la tierra de manera más “eficiente”. La mayoría de los pobres que no está en condiciones de beneficiarse de estas transacciones inmobiliarias, podría ser asistida por medio de “redes de seguridad”

sociales (‘social safety nets’) y ayuda de emergencia hasta que estuvieran en condiciones de encontrar otras fuentes de ingreso.

Afortunadamente, esta visión pesimista no es compartida universalmente. Reformas agrarias redistributivas todavía pueden desempeñar un rol fundamental en aliviar la pobreza rural y en promover un amplio desarrollo sostenible. La creciente diferenciación social, junto con otras consecuencias de la globalización, presentan nuevas oportunidades para reformas significativas, así como también obstáculos. Las contradicciones entre los grandes propietarios sobre los costos y beneficios de la reforma están aumentando. Los campesinos tienen hoy nuevas oportunidades para comunicarse y organizar su acceso a medios modernos de transporte y comunicación. Se encuentran, a su vez, en una mejor posición para hallar aliados y hacer escuchar sus demandas entre especialistas en medio ambiente, organizaciones promotoras de los derechos humanos y otros grupos dentro de la sociedad civil, además de las organizaciones internacionales comprometidas con la promoción del desarrollo igualitario y ecológicamente sostenible. Estrategias de desarrollo de base popular que incluyen reformas radicales no son precisamente obsoletas. El problema es organizar las fuerzas sociales deseosas de apoyarlos.

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◆ Acronyms

ATC	Rural Workers' Federation (Nicaragua)
CERAS	Agrarian Reform Centres (Chile)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CIERA	Centre for Agrarian Reform Research and Studies
CORA	Agrarian Reform Corporation (Chile)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
FRAP	Leftist Popular Action Front (Chile)
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista party)
ICAD	Interamerican Committee for Agricultural Development
ICIRA	Chilean Agrarian Reform Research and Training Institute
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Co-operation
ILO	International Labour Organization
INPROA	Instituto de Promocion Agraria (Institute for Agrarian Promotion)
INDAP	Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (Institute for Agricultural and Livestock Development)
MNR	Nationalist Revolutionary Party (Bolivia)
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Mexico)
SNA	Large Landowners' Association (Chile)
UNAG	Small Farmers' Organization (Nicaragua)
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP	Popular Unity (Chilean coalition)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFP	World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION: LAND TENURE ISSUES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Gross inequality in the control of land constitutes a principal obstacle to broad-based rural development in many developing countries. Land reform providing secure and equitable rights to productive land for the rural poor should clearly be a high priority of states and other actors committed to the pursuit of socially and ecologically sustainable development. Nonetheless, there have been few important land reform initiatives during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Moreover, earlier land reform in several countries often had mixed results, with dubious effects on the livelihoods of the rural poor (although some were much more successful than others when judged by this criterion) (Barraclough, 1992).

Land reform, according to Webster's dictionary, means "measures designed to effect a more equitable distribution of agricultural land, especially by governmental action". As will be seen throughout this paper, its specific form depends on pre-reform land tenure systems and broader institutional structures, as well as on the political dynamics propelling reform. For our purposes it necessarily includes a redistribution of rights to land from large landholders to benefit the rural poor, by providing them with more equitable and secure access to land. Successful land reform, from the viewpoint of the rural poor, has invariably contained a confiscatory element from the viewpoint of large landholders, who lost some of their previous rights and privileges. Land reform is necessarily a political process. When land tenure relations are really altered to benefit tenants, landless workers and near landless peasants, it implies a change in power relationships in favour of those who physically work the land at the expense of those who primarily accumulate wealth from their control over rural land and labour.[1]

The role of the state in land reform is crucial. This is because the state comprises the institutionalized political organization of society. It articulates and implements public policy, and adjudicates conflicts. In theory, the state has a monopoly over the legitimate use of coercive force within its territory, together with the responsibility to pursue "public good" for all its citizens. Land reform without the state's participation would be a contradiction of terms. But how does the state participate? To what avail? To whose advantage or detriment? What are the roles of other social actors? These constitute the subject of the present inquiry. But answers to these questions are quite different for each time and place.

[1] Land reform means different things for different people and in different circumstances. For some, privatization of communal or state lands in order to make them available for commercial use, such as export crop production, is land reform. Many authorities put forward more restrictive definitions similar to that used here. For example: "Land reform (agrarian reform, reforma agraria) comprises (1) compulsory takeover of land, usually (a) by the state, (b) from the biggest landowners, and (c) with partial compensation; and (2) the farming of that land in such a way as to spread the benefits more widely than before the takeover. The state may give, sell or rent such land for private cultivation in smaller units than hitherto (distributionist reform); or the land may be jointly farmed and its usufruct shared although co-operative, collective or state farming (collectivist reform) (Lipton, 1973). The constraints on land reform imposed by diverse agrarian structures are discussed throughout this paper. (See also Ghai, Khan, Lee and Radwan, 1979.)

◆ Divergent Perceptions of Agrarian Problems

The fundamental problem for the rural poor in developing countries is how to maintain or improve their meagre livelihoods. In many developing countries a large proportion of rural residents are victims of the massive livelihood crisis that has accompanied the commercialization of agriculture and associated economic activities (Pearse, 1980). By the late twentieth century there are practically no rural communities that have *not* been incorporated into the global network of world and national markets in one way or another. Land and labour are increasingly treated as commodities to be employed "rationally" in ways that maximize net monetary returns for private proprietors and for the state. This diverts to commercial uses large amounts of land, water and other resources previously available for self-provisioning activities by rural residents.

At the same time, capital-intensive production systems are emerging in developing countries that depend heavily on externally purchased inputs and equipment. These are mostly manufactured abroad or in urban centres of the developing country itself. The same is true for new consumer goods and services that are rapidly replacing or supplementing traditional local foods and artisanal products. Modern farming systems require much less labour per unit of output, and frequently less per hectare, than did the rural production systems they replace.

Processes of land alienation, commercialization and modernization have been accompanied by growing rural populations in most developing countries. Traditional rural livelihood systems often provided deplorable living levels, but under the triple pressures of commercialization, modernization and population growth they are disintegrating before alternative employment opportunities become available. Rural wages deteriorate while rents and other financial obligations of the rural poor become impossible to meet. Landlords expel their tenants and workers. Many smallholders lose their land. Faced with these trends, large numbers of the rural poor have no choice but to migrate. Some move to forest frontiers and other sparsely populated ecologically fragile areas unsuitable for sustainable agriculture. Many more go to urban slums to seek employment or other sources of income, no matter how unpromising their prospects may seem.

Obviously, this brief sketch paints the livelihood crisis of the rural poor with a very broad brush, but there is little alternative when talking about over 100 developing countries. Where rural land rights are relatively equitably distributed and where governments are somewhat responsive to the needs and aspirations of the rural poor, crisis can be avoided or attenuated if there is also sufficient broad-based economic growth to create alternative livelihood opportunities for "redundant" rural people. Other countries with very inequitable agrarian structures, but with rapid growth of income, have been able to avoid catastrophe through a combination of repression and populist programmes. But the rural livelihood crisis in developing countries sketched here is more widespread than many observers care to admit.

Data illustrating the extent of rural poverty are crude but indicative. Stunted child growth is a good indicator of chronic malnutrition associated with severe poverty. About three fifths of all children under five years of age in South Asia, two fifths in Sub-Saharan Africa and one fifth in Latin America were estimated to have

stunted growth in 1990 (FAO-Tech 5, 1995).[2] Most of these stunted children were in rural areas in all three regions. This is to be expected in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, with nearly three fourths of their populations being rural. But serious rural poverty in Latin America was as extensive as in urban areas even though less than one third of the region's population was rural. This suggests that severe poverty was nearly three times higher in rural than urban areas. Available data indicate that serious undernutrition and poverty were also more pronounced in rural than urban Asia and Africa (Barraclough, Ghimire and Meliczek, 1997).

State policies in nearly all developing countries have abetted the incorporation of rural people and resources into national and world markets. In some countries, however, the state adopted peasant-based strategies that put a high priority on promoting greater equity among rural people and on broad-based articulated economic growth. In many others, the dominant state strategy was merely to stimulate economic growth. Several predatory states did not give much priority to either growth or equity. But in all cases the state sooner or later encouraged commercialization and modernization. Some of the political economy factors determining state strategies will receive attention throughout this discussion.

Those who formulate and administer state policies tend to see the agrarian problem from a different perspective than do the rural poor. Governments invariably require increasing sums of foreign exchange. They commonly attempt to "modernize" their economies. This implies the importation of costly modern technologies together with associated inputs of goods and services. They also have to import consumer goods, both to meet the demands of wealthy supporters for luxury products and the needs of growing populations. They attempt to equip and maintain armies and police forces, to service foreign and domestic debts and to reward clients, employees and many others in order to maintain support. Not surprisingly, governments often view agrarian problems primarily in terms of collecting revenues and increasing the marketable agricultural surplus available for domestic use and exports. They almost always seek foreign aid and investments. They also strive to integrate recalcitrant rural groups into state-sponsored programmes and to suppress or deflect social unrest.

The ways governments deal with what they perceive to be multiple agrarian problems are largely determined by circumstances, socio-economic structures and the political system. Public policies are inevitably influenced by political perceptions of what is feasible in the face of conflicting interests and demands among crucial support groups and potentially dangerous opponents, both at home and abroad. Who these groups are and their relative influence depend largely on social institutions.

In the name of development, state policies frequently promote alienation of land used for self-provisioning by the rural poor. Vast areas are appropriated for commercial plantations and ranches. Large tracts are set aside as game reserves, parks and other protected areas, often with the aim of attracting tourists and foreign aid. Land speculators, agro-industries, new settlers and developers are given land that may have been used by indigenous residents since long before the

[2] These data are very poor for many developing countries. The higher proportion of malnourished children in South Asia than in sub-Saharan Africa where food availability is supposedly worse may be largely explained by poor statistics (South Centre, 1997).

present nation state was even created. Colonial governments' policies of ousting or enslaving the natives to provide secure tenure and cheap labour for new colonists were often more blatant than those of the national states that replaced them, but there were many similarities in policies dealing with agrarian issues. This suggests a highly contradictory role of the state in providing equitable and secure access to land. It usually has to choose between promoting the interests of the rural poor or those of its more powerful supporters. Outcomes have typically been compromises that benefited a fraction of the rural poor but that prejudiced a great many others.

◆ The Evolution of Land Tenure Systems and Agrarian Structures

Property relations are fundamental in determining who gains and who loses during modernization processes incorporating reluctant peasantries into national economies and the profit driven world system. But ownership of land, like that of other property, is essentially a sub-set of social relations. It implies a bundle of institutionalized rights and obligations sanctioned by custom or law that regulate relationships among individuals, families, social groups and classes, communities, corporate entities and the state in their access to land and its products. Because the modern state claims exclusive rights to adjudicate legal disputes and to the legitimate use of coercive force within its territory, it is necessarily a key actor in land tenure systems.

Land tenure systems are sometimes classified as private property regimes, common property, state property or open access (non-property) (Bromley, 1989). This typology is helpful for some purposes but less so for others. In reality, one finds that the rights and obligations associated with land ownership and tenancies can assume an almost infinite number of forms in practice. The simplistic dichotomy between public and private property, frequently used indiscriminately by both neo-liberals and Marxists, is dangerously misleading.

The terms "land tenure systems" and "agrarian systems" are often used interchangeably. FAO's distinction between the two terms, however, is useful both for exposition and analysis. Land tenure systems, as explained above, are defined by the legal and customary relations among parties directly using the land or appropriating its products. Agrarian systems refer to the broader institutional framework within which agricultural and related rural activities take place. In addition to land tenure, agrarian systems include credit, marketing, agro-processing, irrigation, technical assistance and other socio-economic and political institutions and public policies most relevant for the rural population. Land tenure systems constitute the core of agrarian structures as they most clearly crystallize rural power relations. They strongly influence the complementary social institutions that comprise agrarian structures.

Land tenure relations, like other institutions, are constantly changing, although their resistance to change is what distinguishes them from more ephemeral policies (purposeful courses of action) by the state and by other social actors. Agrarian institutions have a historical dimension that analysts and policy makers must understand if they are to take effective action to achieve their goals. Machiavelli warned his prince that conflicts over property rights could be even more long lasting and politically dangerous than blood feuds resulting from assassinations.

Present-day conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, or Serbs and Croats, over land rights are examples. It behoves anyone attempting to deal with current agrarian problems to take their historical roots and evolutionary paths in each locality and country fully into account.[3]

Colonial authorities everywhere realized that control of land and cheap labour for colonial enterprises had to go together. If abundant lands were easily accessible to unfree workers for self-provisioning, they would leave to farm for themselves. This would drive up wages, making export commodities more costly and less competitive for estate owners. Where most good agricultural land was already in use and labour abundant, however, such as in much of British India and Dutch Java, it was often more profitable to extract an exportable agricultural surplus from the peasantry through taxes and unfavourable terms of trade. Even in some regions of Africa, it was more profitable to force indigenous populations to undertake the production of export crops by imposing head taxes that had to be paid in cash, which could only be obtained by producing cash crops or working for low wages in colonial enterprises. In every case, the political and economic factors generating widespread rural poverty were mutually supportive. Moreover, the state always played a crucial role. So too did other non-local actors such as transnational and domestic investors, speculators and agents of foreign powers competing for profits and influence.

In developing countries that were never conquered by rich colonial powers or were only briefly subjugated, such as Ethiopia, Thailand and China, processes generating rural poverty and landlessness were in many respects similar to those sketched above. Military occupation and formal annexation were thus not prerequisites for incorporation into the world system in a subordinate role. Home-grown elites could control rural land and labour for their own benefit just as well as colonial authorities, although they often had help from foreign investors, merchants, missionaries and adventurers. As in the former colonies, rural population growth and degraded natural resources contributed to land scarcity in some areas, but not in others. In any event, these were as much symptoms of the style of "development" these states pursued as were the landlessness and poverty that they were allegedly causing.

Divergent historical paths have led to land tenure systems that are to some extent unique in each locality, country and region. In the mid-twentieth century when the United Nations was created and most remaining colonial dependencies were on the verge of achieving independence, three broad patterns of land tenure relations were found, though with countless variations, in what are now called developing countries. One or another of these usually dominated their agrarian structures, but

[3] Nearly four decades ago, a well-known Latin American aristocrat, who was also a leading political figure, landowner, industrialist, financier and philanthropist in his country, explained to me that the dominance of large estates and the marginalization of the rural poor was the result of Darwinian natural selection. The most capable agriculturists extended their holdings, while others simply could not compete. In his opinion, this was nature's way of ensuring progress. An examination of the processes leading to land concentration in various countries, however, is subject to many other explanations. Colonial conquest, commodity exports produced by slaves and other forms of forced labour, and the social institutions that evolved to maintain these exploitative modes of production surely have to enter into any explanation of current agrarian structures of developing countries.

in several countries all three patterns coexisted. During the last half-century, land tenure systems and agrarian structures in nearly all of them have been modified significantly by processes linked to economic modernization, globalization, demographic and political changes, as well as by purposeful "land reforms" of one kind or another. Economic and political factors were always closely intertwined.

Bi-modal *latifundia* systems came to dominate much of Latin America, the Caribbean and the southern United States following European conquest and colonization of the Americas. Similar bi-modal systems arose in several colonial enclaves of Africa and Asia, becoming dominant in much of southern Africa and the Philippines. In these systems, colonial elites organized commercially profitable production for export and domestic markets in large centrally managed estates. These were often worked primarily by slaves or other non-free labourers. The estates' workers commonly also cultivated small plots for self-provisioning, either within the estate or in smallholding communities elsewhere. These bi-modal systems are frequently still characterized by caste-like social relations, which have tended to coincide with perceived ethnic identities. Such social institutions persisted long after slavery and other forms of forced labour had been legally abolished.

The civil and political rights of the landless and near landless were usually severely circumscribed. Smallholders for the most part had very insecure rights to their land as well as disadvantageous access to the services, markets, infrastructure and public subsidies that evolved primarily to benefit large landowners.

In such situations, proposals for land reform, redistributing rights to land and associated agrarian requisites for the benefit of rural poor, have the potential of attracting important political support not only from the intended direct beneficiaries but also from other social groups. Potential supporters might include, among others, urban-based labour and professional unions, nationalist army officers, environmentalists, human rights groups and allied political activists, some foreign aid donors and aspiring political leaders, as well as many merchants, entrepreneurs and others who may see their own opportunities limited by the monopolization of rural resources by traditional landed oligarchies.

The kind of reforms that may become feasible, however, will always depend on particular circumstances. Where mechanized capital-intensive large- and medium-sized farm units have replaced traditionally organized and extensively used large estates in controlling most good agricultural land, for example, sub-division into small family-sized farms may appear less attractive than other policies designed to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor. But to bring about improvements in access to and quality of rural services, better working conditions, the observance of civic and other human rights, collective bargaining, the creation of alternative employment opportunities and progressive tax systems that substantively benefit the rural landless and near landless is as difficult politically as it is to redistribute land to them.

Clientelistic small-cultivator land systems emerged in much of East and South Asia long before European colonial penetration. Somewhat similar systems had evolved in parts of North Africa, the Middle East and in feudal Europe itself. Land ownership was vested legally in the rulers of empires or other tributary political systems. A complex of rights and duties evolved governing rights to land together

with associated obligations by subordinate political and ecclesiastic hierarchies. Actual production was usually undertaken by individual cultivators and their immediate families, who enjoyed some degree of autonomy in their management decisions. These small cultivators in turn owed obligations in personal services and products or other tributes to the overlords, who provided protection as well as other spiritual and material benefits. These widespread tributary systems can serve as a reminder that the "social contracts" leading to the modern nation state were, for the most part, rather coercive.

Colonial conquest in some places, and the mere penetration of regional and local markets by merchants and entrepreneurs backed by a colonial power's military superiority in others, diverted a share of agricultural tributes from indigenous rulers to outsiders as well as usually increasing the burden of payments for the rural poor. On the whole, however, even after agricultural regions were incorporated into colonial and international markets, small cultivators continued to work the land in family-operated holdings under diverse tenancy arrangements. Land ownership often became highly concentrated but operating units remained mostly small.

Land reform in such situations mostly implied providing tenants and other small cultivators with secure and more equitable rights to the land they cultivated, together with better access to services, markets and infrastructure. Following land reforms, co-operative and other forms of collective effort were frequently promoted by the state to rehabilitate and improve the agrarian infrastructure. Where large proportions of the rural population were landless, collective land tenure institutions also provided a way to incorporate them on more equitable terms. But small cultivator systems have proved remarkably resilient. Most large collective farm units established in China and Viet Nam following their agrarian reforms, for example, eventually reverted to cultivation in small units by individual families, although on a more equitable basis than before land reform.

Customary communal land tenure systems continue to have an important role in regulating access to land and its benefits in much of Sub-Saharan Africa. They also still retain a significant but subordinate role in a few marginal areas of Asia and the Americas. In these systems, land is considered to be the common property of the clan, ethnic group or other community occupying the territory, although actual cultivation is usually undertaken by individuals and their immediate families. Outsiders can be granted certain access rights or be excluded, but this implies the consent of the community. Usufruct rights to individuals are allocated by community authorities on the basis of needs and other criteria, while all members of the community, even if they have moved away, retain hereditary land rights. These customary land systems have persisted in may regions in spite of having been formally superseded by colonial and post-colonial legal codes vesting ultimate land ownership with the state or private entities.

The legal codes regulating land tenure adopted by developing countries were often inherited from the colonial era or patterned after some developed country model. These laws frequently contradicted customary land tenure norms. Also, they were subject to being altered by the state to deal with pressing political, socio-economic and financial problems confronting the state itself or its most influential support groups. States' land legislation frequently had little relation to the social realities in rural areas still under customary tenures. Contradictions between customary

communal land tenure systems and the legal codes adopted by new nation states were inevitable. Which rules prevailed in a given place and time depended on particular circumstances. Customary communal tenure systems were subordinated to national land codes when these served the perceived interests of new nation states. This situation has created great insecurity of tenure for communal landholders, especially in much of sub-Saharan Africa.

Land reform in these situations is usually perceived by the state and its principal support groups as the imposition of private or state property regimes on backward communities resisting modernization. Many international and bilateral donors have tended to share this perspective. Most members of rural communities and many NGOs, however, are more likely to support land reform that promise effective recognition by the state of customary rights and the restitution to rural communities of alienated lands.

◆ The Need to Reform Inequitable Agrarian Structures

Most of the rural poor in developing countries are landless or nearly landless, but they usually have some kind of access to agricultural land. They are likely to be full-time or seasonal wage workers, tenants of various types, squatters or smallholders with insufficient land and insecure property rights.[4] The main problem for the rural poor lies in insecure and inequitable terms of access to land and other requisites for decent livelihoods. Many are unable to produce enough to meet their basic needs. Others produce a surplus that is appropriated by landlords, employers, creditors, intermediaries, collectors of fees or taxes, and others. As a result, the rural poor in developing countries are often unable to provide themselves and their families with locally acceptable livelihoods.[5] As they usually have no opportunities for finding better livelihoods elsewhere, and as the state seldom has the capacity to provide them with basic social services or other relief, land reform may be the only viable solution for their acute poverty.

There are many other reasons for undertaking land reform depending on each particular situation. Landlords may be consumption-prone and inefficient. Smallholders often use their land and labour more intensively and efficiently than do large producers. Increased demand for consumption goods, inputs and services by land reform beneficiaries can stimulate integrated and more sustainable rural development. Highly concentrated control of land is usually incompatible with democratic processes and institutions. The issues of equity, security and acceptable livelihoods for the rural poor, however, are always fundamental.

[4] All of these tenure categories have a different significance in differing contexts. A small sharecropper, leaseholder or other tenant in the United Kingdom, for example, may have more secure rights to land and incentives to invest in improvements than a small property owner in many developing countries.

[5] What constitutes an acceptable livelihood depends on the time and place. The concept of poverty always has a relative dimension contrasting it with wealth and affluence. As a minimum, an acceptable livelihood has to provide sufficient food, shelter and fulfil other basic needs for survival and reproduction. To the extent that rural communities are incorporated into modernizing nation states, and these in turn into the world system, perceptions of acceptable livelihoods in rural communities are increasingly influenced by national and international norms.

The underlying agrarian problem in numerous developing countries today is not much different than it was in eighteenth-century Western Europe. A distinguished historian described it as follows:

> The agrarian problem was . . . the fundamental one in the world of 1789. And the crux of the agrarian problem was the relation between those who cultivated the land and those who owned it, those who produced its wealth and those who accumulated it (Hobsbawm, 1962:29).

◆ Actors and Issues: The Argument

Land reform necessarily requires participation by its intended beneficiaries as well as by the large holders, who lose some of their land rights, and by the state that, as a minimum, provides the legal framework for reform. As will be seen, many other social actors always play a role in bringing about reform and in shaping its subsequent evolution. Sometimes other actors are far more influential than are the landless and near-landless, who are supposed to benefit, or the large landowners, who stand to lose. The state always has a key role because all the parties involved ultimately attempt to advance their own agendas through public policies.

A few of the potential "external" supporters of reform, such as urban-based labour unions and professionals, nationalist entrepreneurs or military officers, some foreign aid agencies, environmentally or human rights oriented-NGOs, as well as political parties, were mentioned earlier. A similar list could be made of potential opponents and co-opters of reform. Many of the same actors would appear on both lists. It is not very useful to make hypothetical lists, however, before examining the principal social actors influencing reform in concrete situations. They have been somewhat different in each case, but they usually have included both domestic and transnational groups. A few discernible patterns will be mentioned later.

A review of the role of the state and other social actors in land reform in Latin America during recent decades brings out the contradictory pressures on the state from different support groups concerning security of tenure and more equitable access to land which, by definition, are the key issues of land reform. It asks how public policies contributed to or hindered grassroots mobilization and the organization of the rural poor with the aim of bringing about and consolidating more equitable land tenure. Who were the beneficiaries and on what terms did they receive better access to land? How were former large owners compensated? What kind of agrarian structure emerged? The state is shown to play a very contradictory role. Moreover, its role can change rapidly with variations in the relative power of different social groups and shifting alliances among them. A review of the roles of major actors in each case helps focus the discussion.

The next section attempts to draw some generalizations about the role of the state and other actors. It is largely based on the Latin American cases already discussed, but it also refers to land reforms in Asia and elsewhere to illustrate several of the conclusions.

The last section considers the role of the state and other social actors during contemporary land reform processes in developing countries. Transnationalization of economic activities has advanced rapidly since the 1950s. So, too, have urbanization and social differentiation in most developing countries. Many weak

nation states have lost much of their autonomy for determining national trade, monetary, fiscal and institutional policies in the new global economic order, which is regulated through volatile transnational financial and commodity markets. A single superpower now holds global military supremacy together with predominant economic and political influence. Land reform at the end of the twentieth century, if it occurs, will take place in a different context than previously. This has to be taken into account in assessing the roles of potential actors. How can the bleak prospects for land reform in developing countries be improved through the actions of popularly based organizations, NGOs, national and transnational corporations, political parties, international organizations and bilateral agencies? Answers to such questions may be different for each developing country. In any event they must be highly speculative.

THE DYNAMICS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY LATIN AMERICAN LAND REFORMS: CASES

A review of several major twentieth century land reforms by the present author concluded that each reform process was unique. Groups of peasants, rural workers and rural elites interacted in very specific historical contexts with those of the state and other domestic and foreign-based actors in shaping outcomes. Ongoing social processes are invariably too complex for reductionist explanations unless they are essentially definitional truisms. In any event, the well-known social, economic and administrative arguments commonly advanced in favour of land reform, or to oppose it, seem to have had rather minor impacts on the political processes determining what actually happened (Barraclough, 1992).

The cases discussed here are from Latin America, where I was deeply involved with land reform issues from the late 1950s. These Latin American experiences are supplemented in the following section by references to land reforms in selected Asian and African countries. The emphasis is on the roles of the principal actors.

◆ Mexico

The first major twentieth century land reform occurred in Mexico. Land reform began in several Mexican states soon after 1910 and culminated nation-wide in the late 1930s. Nonetheless, land tenure has remained a central political issue to the present day. It is instructive to look at the Mexican case at some length because it brings out the complexity of land reform processes.

On the eve of the revolution, over half the country's agricultural land was held in about 6,000 large estates of over 1,000 hectares each; a few of these estates were over a million hectares in size. These large holdings were controlled by only about 1,000 landowning families and corporations. In 1910 the country's total population was some 16 million people, over two thirds of whom were engaged in agriculture. By 1995 Mexico's population had reached 94 million, with only one fourth working in agriculture. This reveals the scope of the social transformation that has taken place.

Most of the Mexican rural population in 1910 was landless or nearly landless. About half resided within large estates to which they owed onerous labour services, rents or product shares. Nearly all the remainder were in smallholding communities with precarious rights to small parcels of land. There were also several thousand private producers (*rancheros*) with holdings ranging from less than 100 to over 1,000 hectares. Of course, highly variable land quality and access to water meant that the size of holdings is at best only a very rough measure of land concentration.

The concentration of land in large estates had increased rapidly in Mexico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Estate owners had incorporated many new areas previously legally considered communally or state-owned lands, as well as some smaller parcels that had been privately owned properties. Communal and other peasant producers would seldom voluntarily sell at any price the land and water rights upon which their livelihoods depended. When they were unable to purchase the land and water they needed for expansion, large estate owners acquired it by other means. They used their overwhelming socio-economic and political power to ensure that the state was their principal accomplice in appropriating more land. The state's laws, judiciary, police powers and economic policies were all supportive of the estate owners' agenda. As a result, many peasant communities and smaller private landholders lost access to some or all of their customary resources. In spite of impressive economic growth and modernization nationally, the diets and living levels of most rural people deteriorated between 1876 and 1910.

Large-scale agriculture in Mexico before the revolution had become increasingly commercialized. Production of sugar, cotton, coffee, cattle and the like for domestic and export markets grew rapidly and benefited from state protection and subsidies. Production of corn, beans and other staples consumed by the poor, on the contrary, had decreased. Imports of these foods, principally from the United States, had been actively encouraged. New investments in agro-industry, railroads, other urban and rural infrastructure and mining poured into the country from the United States and Western Europe, but they failed to benefit most of the rural poor. This created a receptive context for the subsequent revolutionary process, leading to massive land reform (Hansen, 1971; Herzog, 1960).

The authoritarian Diaz regime had exercised the state's power skilfully and ruthlessly to advance the modernization agenda of wealthy investors and estate owners. The central government forged complex political alliances in each Mexican state and locality that rewarded leaders who co-operated with its programme, while eliminating or marginalizing those who did not. The estate owners got most of what they wanted, but at the price of having to accept some populist programmes and political leadership imbedded in local power structures that included indigenous and *mestizo* communities. This helped to control peasant unrest. High-level technocrats (*los cientificos*) were influential in formulating and administering state policies. These were mostly well educated lawyers, engineers, economists and the like from Mexico's upper classes, predominately of European origins. Execution of policies on the ground, however, was frequently entrusted to notables and technicians who possessed family and other connections with local communities as well as with estate owners.

The Mexican revolution began in 1910 and officially ended with the adoption of a new constitution in 1917. The new political system, however, did not stabilize until the late 1930s when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) consolidated its control of the Mexican state and key sectors of civil society at all levels in the entire country. The revolution began as an intra-elite struggle for power sparked by a widespread perception that, whether or not the aging dictator chose to be "re-elected" to the presidency again in 1910, his 34-year regime was inevitably drawing to a close.

What began as several minor conflicts was soon transformed into a major social explosion. This was facilitated when competing elite factions sought broader popular support that could reinforce their relative bargaining power. Armed peasants in some states took advantage of a breakdown in central government authority to reclaim communal lands and to occupy *haciendas*. The peasant uprising was particularly intense in the southern state of Morelos, where indigenous communal traditions were strong and where the recent expansion of large estates into communal areas had been very aggressive, generating many conflicts (Womack, 1969; Warman, 1976). By 1916 peasant armies led by Emeliano Zapata had occupied most of the large estates and redistributed lands to the peasant communities that had lost them earlier. In the North, however, where the influence of the United States was greatest and where the major challenge to the Diaz regime had originated, indigenous traditions were much weaker. There, peasant demands for return of lost lands tended to be secondary to those for better wages and working conditions, as well as for more equitable opportunities to establish privately owned commercial farms and other opportunities for social and economic advancement (Hansen, 1971).

The 1917 constitution declared the supremacy of the state, representing the public interest over private property, thus legitimizing the expropriation and redistribution of land. This concession to peasant revolutionary forces and ideals, however, was for the most part only implemented in places where armed peasants had to be pacified. Although a new agrarian reform law was proclaimed in 1922, only about 8 million hectares had been legally redistributed by the beginning of the Cárdenas administration in 1934.

The Cárdenas government was faced with the widespread unemployment and declining incomes that accompanied the great depression of the 1930s. Its populist coalition mobilized the peasantry as well as urban workers and important middle-class sectors in support of a wide range of social reforms. About two fifths of Mexico's arable land (some 18 million hectares) was expropriated between 1934 and 1940 (Hansen, 1971). By 1940 land reform had included about half the country's farm lands and had benefited over half of its rural poor. The land was redistributed to tenants, workers and peasants in *ejidos*. These were communally owned but worked mostly in small parcels by individual families. A few successful collectively worked *ejido* enterprises also emerged with government support. Most notable among these were the collectively worked cotton producing *ejidos* in the arid northern Laguna region (Restrepo and Eckstein, 1975; Alcántara, 1997).

Usually the beneficiaries of land reforms in Mexico were not required to pay for the land they received, and the former large owners were not compensated. The state assumed the obligation to provide the peasants with credit, technical assistance, marketing and social services. An aim of the insurgent peasant

communities as well as of most progressive reformers in the Cárdenas coalition was for the *ejidos* to become democratically self-managed by their members and to be as autonomous as possible. This was the rationale for creating an *ejido* bank to serve land reform beneficiaries so that they would not have to compete with better heeled and educated commercial farmers for scarce public funds. The Cárdenas administration gave a high priority to the peasantry in the allocation of credit, investments in infrastructure and the provision of social services. Many observers noted impressive economic, social and political gains for the rural poor accompanying the Cárdenas reform.

The main actors in bringing about reform were peasant activists and the state. But the state's role after 1910 was vacillatory and contradictory, depending on unstable alliances and changes in relative power among key support groups. State policies became less and less peasant-oriented following 1940. The Second World War implied booming markets in the United States for Mexican exports and for its migrant workers, together with severely restricted availability of most imports. Mexico had to become more self-reliant. This meant that other sectors of Mexican society, such as industrialists, commercial farmers, the urban middle class, labourers and domestic financiers became increasingly influential. And following the war, rapid economic growth in the United States, Europe and Japan provided expanding markets which accentuated some of these wartime trends. Urbanization proceeded rapidly and tourism became a leading source of foreign exchange, along with new foreign investments. Renewed availability of imported manufactured and other goods after 1945 was accompanied by tariffs, quotas and other restrictions to protect domestic industries and farmers.

Post-Cárdenas regimes continued land expropriation and redistribution, but primarily of poor-quality land, in response to localized social problems and clientelistic pressures from powerful support groups. The PRI-affiliated peasant and labour confederations increasingly became instruments for social and political control, and less semi-autonomous organizations belonging to their members and representing their interests. The state's virtual monopoly of credit, marketing channels and technical assistance was often used to control and divide the peasantry. Successive PRI regimes after 1940 enabled the country to experience four decades of rapid economic growth and relative internal peace, but the bulk of the peasantry again became increasingly marginalized. In some respects, Mexico's development strategy and the political instruments used to implement it in the 1980s resembled the Diaz regime a century earlier. The differences were fundamental, however, as the country had become predominately urban, relatively industrialized and, except for a few regions such as parts of Chiapas, the rural poor were no longer at the mercy of a traditional rural elite dominated by owners of a few large estates. Land reform, despite all its deficiencies and ambiguities, had made a major contribution to these changes.

Francisco Madero's successful campaign to unseat Diaz at the beginning of the revolution was partly organized and financed with the help of allies in the United States. The United States Army intervened twice during the revolutionary conflicts, but unlike in Guatemala, Chile and Nicaragua later, the United States did not attempt to stop land reform. In fact, the Roosevelt Administration was rather sympathetic during the Cárdenas period.

Several outside actors other than the state, the peasants and competing political factions and parties made important contributions in promoting and consolidating land reform. The role of rural school teachers was often crucial for partially literate peasants in articulating their demands and aspirations. A rural teacher drafted the Zapatistas' *Plan de Ayala* that served as a powerful manifesto for the agrarian movement when the revolution began. Dedicated idealistic lawyers, agronomists and many others worked with peasant activists throughout the reform period. Urban-based artists and intellectuals were particularly active during the 1920s and 1930s in support of reform. Labour union support of the peasantry was also frequently decisive in advancing land reform. Many journalists, writers and researchers had an important role in informing public opinion at home and abroad about the nature of the social conflicts behind revolutionary violence. During the Cárdenas period, the league of socialist agronomists provided invaluable technical assistance for many *ejidos* throughout the country, especially the collective *ejidos*. During the post-war decades, numerous domestic and international NGOs helped peasants with advocacy, research and technical assistance. After 1950 international and bilateral aid agencies also provided some assistance for rural development projects, but on a much less important scale than in many other developing countries.

◆ Bolivia

Land reform in Bolivia in many respects resembled that in Mexico earlier. The 1951-1952 Bolivian revolution followed several decades of unstable control of the state by competing oligarchic factions allied with various professional and other emerging new social groups. When the Nationalist Revolutionary Party's (MNR) exiled candidate for the presidency received a plurality of votes (from a very restricted mostly urban-based electorate) in 1951, the election was annulled. The MNR mobilized support from the powerful militant miners' unions, urban workers, nationalist military officers and some sections of the peasantry. This movement culminated in a popular uprising bringing the MNR back to power in 1952, a decade after it had been forced out by the more traditional factions of the large-estate owning, mining and military oligarchy.

The MNR had made rather vague populist promises of land for the country's severely repressed indigenous peasantry as well as for the somewhat better-off *Cholo* (*mestizo*) rural minority. The *Cholos* in rural areas spoke Spanish and had adopted many urban customs, which facilitated their roles as intermediaries between the urban-based elite, mostly of European descent, and the indigenous rural majority. Most of the Indians were serfs on large estates or resided in indigenous communities that had lost their best lands to the estates. Since the colonial period they had been without basic civil rights and deprived of formal education as a matter of state policy. By the mid-twentieth century many had been exposed to new ideas and aspirations through forced labour in the strongly unionized mines, conscription in the army during the costly Chaco war with Paraguay in the 1930s, contact with missionary schools and diverse other channels.

Following the disruption of traditional state power during the revolution, organized peasants sometimes occupied large estates and burned *hacienda* buildings in rural areas. In other places, frightened absentee estate owners simply abandoned their rural properties. In 1961, for example, I visited an abandoned large estate near Cochabamba with a Quechua-speaking Peruvian anthropologist. The *hacienda*

buildings were all intact, as were the estate's rather meagre stocks of farm machinery, which remained untouched in their sheds. Part of the estate had been reclaimed by a neighbouring indigenous community, while the rest was divided into family-sized plots for self-provisioning by the estate's *peons* and other resident tenants, who also retained most of the estate's pastures for their common use. These peasants told us that they had not been visited by a state agrarian official since the revolution 10 years earlier.

The 1953 agrarian reform legislation provided for expropriation of poorly managed large estates and the partial expropriation of other large rural properties for redistribution to the peasantry. In many ways this was merely a legal recognition of a *de facto* land reform process that had already taken place or was well underway. Providing legal titles to land reform beneficiaries did not even commence in most places until the early 1960s, and in some areas it has not yet been completed. The reform was cheap for the state in financial terms — the peasants had, for the most part, been farming the same lands in the same ways before and afterwards. The main benefits for the peasants were that they no longer had to deliver part of their produce, together with their labour services, to the representatives of the estate owners and that they now had greater independence and human dignity.

During the 1950s, large estates that had included more than half of Bolivia's agricultural land, located mostly in the Andean high plains and valleys, were taken over by their tenant residents and nearby communities. Over half the country's rural poor received better access to land. Overall, food production increased during the reform, but marketed food supplies for the cities declined when most peasant producers increased their own consumption. Peasant food production could have increased much more than it did following the reform if state policies had been supportive. The ready availability of highly subsidized cheap food imports from the United States and later from Europe, however, made it unnecessary for the state to pursue a peasant-based development strategy after the revolution and land reform. Most public and private investments in agriculture after the early 1950s were directed toward a few large agro-industrial producers in Bolivia's Amazon region that had been little affected by the land reform. Peasant organizations were frequently infiltrated and co-opted for political purposes. Those former estate owners who retained part of their properties were often able to reconstruct clientelistic networks. The most significant achievement of the reform was that members of the country's indigenous majority were, for the first time since the Spanish conquest, legally recognized as full citizens with formal rights to vote, to basic education and to relatively secure communal or individual land holdings.

As in Mexico, many other actors influenced land reform and its aftermath. Peasant organizations, labour unions and the state, however, were the principal protagonists. Bilateral and international aid agencies were active in Bolivia following land reform. As seen above, sometimes their policies had negative consequences for the peasantry. During the 1980s, international and national NGOs became very active in many rural areas. Some of them helped to attenuate the negative impacts for the rural poor of the World Bank/IMF-sponsored structural adjustment programme that began in 1985. The number of officially registered NGOs increased from about 100 to over 500 between 1980 and the early 1990s. Some played constructive roles in training, technical assistance and advocacy for peasant causes. Many, however, sponsored small-scale projects in

rural communities that had little positive impact, while staff salaries and other NGO operating costs absorbed most of their resources. NGO activities often helped to deflect political opposition to the state's neo-liberal policies that prejudiced much of the peasantry. In this way some NGOs helped to legitimize the dominant anti-peasant development strategy.

◆ Guatemala

Social reforms extending minimal legal and political rights to the country's indigenous rural majority began with the Arevelo administration in 1944, following the collapse of the lengthy Ubico dictatorship. This represented a major change in the state's historic policies of severe repression of the indigenous population. These reforms were primarily instigated by middle-class urban sectors and also by some progressive nationalist elements in the army that had formerly been closely allied with the traditional landowning oligarchy. The control of the state by large landowners had been severely weakened during the Second World War by the loss of German markets for coffee exports and German investments in coffee production, as well as by the nationalization of many large German-owned coffee estates, in response to pressure from the United States.

In 1952 the Arbenz regime, which had been democratically elected, promulgated an agrarian reform. This reform was in part motivated by a desire of the new administration to modernize the country more rapidly along lines inspired by the experience in Mexico, where many progressive Guatemalans had been exiled during the Ubico regime. Also, the government sought to broaden its popular base by including the mostly indigenous peasant majority among its supporters. Land from large estates, both privately and publicly held, was redistributed to peasant producers in small holdings. The state attempted to provide the peasants with credit, access to markets and technical assistance. Large landowners were compensated with state bonds on the basis of their usually greatly undervalued tax declarations. About 40 per cent of the rural poor received land between 1952 and 1954. The reform was quite orderly and food production increased rapidly.

This land reform, however, was short-lived. Large areas held by the United States-based United Fruit Company were expropriated. This contributed to the United States administration's Cold-War preoccupation about the possible spread in Latin America of governments with Marxist sympathies. Moreover, the US Secretary of State and the head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had close ties with the United Fruit Company. The US government planned and supported the military coup in Guatemala that took place in 1954. A US airforce officer told me a decade later that he was sent to Guatemala in 1953 to help prepare the coup. After a year of work he reported that it was ready and would be successful, but that based on his experience in the country he believed overthrowing the reformist Arbenz government would be contrary to US interests. He was rewarded by being transferred immediately to the front lines in the Korean war.

The coup succeeded and the new military regime annulled the land reform. Expropriated lands were returned to the former large estate owners. Peasant and worker organizations were severely repressed. In the 1990s, about 3 per cent of the owners of agricultural land in Guatemala controlled over two thirds of the country's agricultural area. Some 90 per cent of the rural population, mostly Indians, were nearly or completely landless. The prolonged bloody civil war after

1954 left over 150,000 killed and many more displaced or exiled. This costly conflict was in part due to the reversal of the Arbenz administration's land reform.

Peasant militancy had played a much smaller role in the Arbenz reform than it had in those of Mexico and Bolivia. Latent peasant demands and resentment, however, had been an important factor in convincing political leaders that the reform would attract important peasant support. Progressive intellectuals as well as some former military officers, including Arbenz, were extremely influential in promoting the land reform. So too were labour union leaders and professionals, including many agronomists and teachers.

After the 1954 military coup, progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, as well as several national and international agencies and NGOs, denounced the abuses suffered by peasants, often at great personal and institutional cost. Many NGOs and international agencies, however, tacitly supported repression of peasant protests. Intervention by the US government had been decisive in undoing the Arbenz reform and in propping up subsequent repressive regimes. Much later, in 1997, the United Nations with US support helped broker a fragile negotiated peace agreement, but without land reform.

◆ Puerto Rico

In the 1940s Puerto Rico was still a US territory acquired through the Spanish American war nearly a half century earlier. Peasant unrest was endemic in this small, densely populated island. Its agriculture was dominated by corporate large estates producing sugar for the protected US market. In the 1930s nearly three fourths of the population depended on sugar production directly or indirectly for its livelihood. As a result, the island had become heavily dependent on US imports for most of its food supplies. Roosevelt's "New Deal" in the United States greatly influenced US policies in Puerto Rico. New Deal legislation extended US labour and civil rights protection to the island's population and attempted to bring about a more equitable distribution of the island's income. Puerto Rican nationalists were campaigning, often violently, for full independence, while the conservative Puerto Rican republican party wanted full statehood. The US administration supported the popular democratic party led by Luis Muñoz Marín in its demands for New Deal-type economic and social reforms together with greater autonomy for the island, but still leaving it associated with the US and its people as US citizens.

Both the US administration and Muñoz Marín's popular democratic party supported a rather radical land reform in the late 1940s. The big sugar corporations were expropriated (with compensation) and converted into worker-managed proportional profit farms. In addition, an important portion of the rural population received titles to small plots of land for a house and garden. Political support for these policies in the US came from labour unions and other progressive allies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Also, the land reform received some support from sugar producers in Hawaii and Louisiana who had to compete with lower cost Puerto Rican sugar producers in the protected US market.

Land reform contributed to durable widespread popular support for Muñoz Marín's party during and after the island's transition to associated Commonwealth status with the US in 1950. The proportional profit farms seldom made profits, however, as sugar production became increasingly non-competitive. Other

Caribbean sugar-producing countries, such as Cuba, were unhampered by US labour laws and their sugar workers had few possibilities of finding alternative livelihoods. Industrial and other urban job opportunities were expanding in Puerto Rico, and were also available for Puerto Ricans by easy emigration to the United States. The distribution to many rural families of small house and garden plots as a result of the land reform was popular among Puerto Ricans. Its rural population increasingly saw its only path to socio-economic advancement to lie with urban employment or emigration to the US, not peasant agriculture. When the family had secure title to a parcel of land and a house, it was much easier for the younger members to seek employment elsewhere.

After land reform, Puerto Rico continued to depend heavily on food imports and income transfers from the US. Sugar production fell, as did many other Puerto Rican agricultural exports, while the island became increasingly integrated into the US. In spite of a shrinking agricultural sector, however, land reform was a resounding political success for its instigators. The island's agricultural production would have declined in any event given the international context, but without land reform the negative social impacts would have been much more severe.

◆ Cuba

In the 1950s Cuba was even more dependent on sugar exports than Puerto Rico had been in the 1930s. Not only was control of agricultural land largely monopolized by a few domestic and foreign individual and corporate owners, but the escape valves of emigration to the US and income transfers to the rural poor from the US were largely closed. Instead of a somewhat socially concerned colonial administration, such as that of Puerto Rico in the 1930s and 1940s, the Cuban state had been administered by a series of rather corrupt governments that had inherited power after US occupation forces had left the country four decades earlier.

The Cuban revolutionary forces that triumphed in 1959 counted on broad-based support from peasants, workers, nationalist intellectuals and professionals, as well as many other sectors of Cuban society. Not surprisingly, land reform was a high priority for the Castro-led revolutionary forces. They had been protected and augmented by the peasantry of Oriente for many months before the collapse of the Batista dictatorship.

The first Cuban agrarian reform was rather mild in comparison to those in Mexico and Bolivia, as only very large holdings were expropriated. When the US retaliated with a trade embargo, all US property owners were expropriated. Under a second agrarian reform law all holdings over 67 hectares in size were taken over by the state. Three quarters of the country's agricultural land had been expropriated by 1964. Most estates were first turned over to their resident workers as co-operatives. These were soon converted into state farms. Over one fourth of the agricultural land, however, was held by individual peasant farmers or by their smallholders production co-operatives.

The inclusion of most expropriated land in large state farm units was partly a consequence of the pre-reform agrarian structure. The sugar plantations and many big ranches and other estates were modern integrated industrial operating units, with heavy investments in machinery, irrigation and other infrastructure. Their

workers were not peasant producers but were primarily industrial workers. One state farm I visited in 1972 had recently received modern dairy equipment from Czechoslovakia. Examination of its accounts suggested that worker productivity had not increased as a result of this huge investment. In discussions about this paradox with the farm's administrative council, it turned out that the workers had decided to reduce their work time from one 12-hour per day shift to two seven-hour shifts upon receipt of the labour-saving modern equipment. This was congruent with industrial worker experiences and aspirations but not with those of peasant farmers.

Cuban agricultural production declined in the 1960s, but then increased at about the average rate for Latin America during the 1970s and early 1980s. Massive aid from the Soviet bloc had been partially offset by the US embargo, but had been sufficient to support an expanding economy and rising living levels for most Cubans. When trade and aid from the USSR terminated after 1989, Cuban agriculture and the rest of the economy suffered a severe recession. Extreme rural poverty had virtually been eliminated in Cuba after the land reform. Everyone was entitled to basic food rations as well as to good-quality educational and health services. After the collapse of the USSR, however, lack of imported inputs, such as livestock feed, fuel, chemicals and repair parts, caused agricultural production to fall drastically.

In an attempt to improve efficiency and incentives, farmers' markets were again legalized in 1993. Over half of the area in state farms was turned over to smaller production co-operatives in what amounted to another land reform. These and other reforms helped stop the decline in production, but the situation remained critical due largely to the country's greatly reduced import capacity accentuated by a tightened US embargo. Dependency on food imports had been over one third of consumption before the revolution. It increased to over half of consumption by the 1980s. Similar levels of dependency on food imports were registered in most other Caribbean island states in the 1970s and 1980s. In Cuba in 1996 it remained close to 40 per cent of a reduced level of food consumption. This high level of dependency on food imports was not a result of the land reform, but of a development strategy that gave a high priority to promoting sugar and a few other exports while neglecting small-scale agriculture. As was seen above, a similar food import dependency had evolved in Puerto Rico in the 1930s.

The state and the rural poor were the primary actors initiating the Cuban land reform. The policies of the ruling party, the USSR and the United States, however, decisively influenced how the land reform evolved. These "external" actors' policies have, in part, determined the fluctuations in living levels and productivities of the land reform beneficiaries since 1964.

◆ Venezuela

Land reform in the early 1960s was negotiated by a new democratically elected government that had replaced a prolonged and brutal military dictatorship. Land reform was preceded by widespread peasant union organization and protests, which contributed to the previous authoritarian regime's collapse. One fourth of the country's rural landless received farms of about 10 hectares each, about one tenth of the country's agricultural land. Half the land allocated to peasants came from expropriated large estates and half from state-owned public lands.

Venezuela in the early 1960s was in transition from being largely an agricultural-based economy to an urban society with an economy based primarily on petroleum exports. Income from petroleum enabled the state to minimize opposition to the land reform by granting liberal compensation to expropriated large estate owners and by providing liberal credits, infrastructure and services for land reform beneficiaries. I visited expropriated large estates in the 1960s where the owners had deliberately promoted strikes and demands for land by their workers and tenants in order to qualify for expropriation and thus receive compensation from the state for their properties at higher-than-market values.

This well-financed market-friendly reform, however, was not notably successful either in reducing rural poverty or in stimulating agricultural production. Much of the worst rural poverty was in areas little affected by the land reform. Many land reform beneficiaries soon abandoned their new holdings to seek higher incomes in the expanding petroleum export-stimulated urban economy. Food security improved for those who gained access to land from the reform, but the land reform's impact was dwarfed by the petroleum boom in the 1960s and 1970s, and later by the collapse of petroleum prices in the 1980s.

Peasant unions allied with political parties seeking peasant support had been principal actors in bringing about this land reform. Other actors included progressive church groups, labour unions, NGOs, many professionals and intellectuals, as well as bilateral and international organizations. Intra-elite competition for power and the relative decline of the influence of large landowners in an increasingly urban- and petroleum-based economy dominated by transnational corporations had greatly facilitated market-friendly land reform. But the land reform had a rather small socio-economic and political impact on Venezuelan society compared to those in Mexico, Bolivia and Cuba.

◆ Chile

Electoral politics was an important mechanism pushing land reform in Chile from a timid beginning to a radical climax that implied profound modifications in agrarian structure. A counter-reform after 1973 was accompanied by further structural changes.

Much of rural Chile in the 1950s was dominated by large estate owners, many of whom maintained quasi-feudal relations with their tenants, workers and neighbouring smallholders. Three decades later, most Chilean agricultural land was controlled by capitalist farmers using increasingly modern capital-intensive technologies and principally employing non-resident wage labourers. While several of these commercial farms were still large, most good land was managed by medium- or family-sized owners and tenants. There were still substantial numbers of landless and near landless rural poor, but considerably fewer both proportionally and absolutely than before the land reform.

I was deeply involved with Chilean land reform issues from 1959 through 1973, first as a FAO specialist on agrarian policies and after 1964 as manager of a FAO/UNDP technical assistance project designed to support the Chilean Agrarian Reform Research and Training Institute (ICIRA), which was one of the actors in the reform process. All participant-observers have their own interpretations of the

roles of various actors, but many of us tend to agree on several key points. What follows, of course, are my own views.

Land ownership in Chile before the land reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s remained highly concentrated in large estates. Over 80 per cent of the country's agricultural land was included in only some 10,000 properties in 1955. The owners of these large estates would have represented only 3 per cent of the total number of rural families (most large estate owners, however, were absentee, living all or part of the time in urban areas), assuming a separate owner for each estate. Many estates belonged to the same landowner, or members of their immediate families, however, making the real concentration of ownership much greater.

The legal concentration of land ownership in Chile in the 1950s was about the same as it had been before land reform in Mexico, Bolivia, Cuba and several other Latin American countries. The quasi-feudal domination by large landowners over the rural population, however, had begun to erode seriously in Chile since the early 1920s. Passive resistance to the estate owners' dominance of the countryside was often supplemented by strikes and other forms of overt protest, especially by workers who had returned from temporary labour in the unionized nitrate fields, mines or urban centres.

Under political pressures from unions, middle-class groups and left-leaning parties in 1931, Chile adopted a national labour code inspired by standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Large Landowners' Association (SNA) bitterly, and in part successfully, resisted extension of the code's provisions to the rural workforce. Nonetheless, it provided a legal rallying point for rural workers — with the help of leftist parties, urban labour unions and other allies — to press for greater rights, such as protection against arbitrary dismissals, payment in cash for part of their labour services, lessened hyper-exploitation by estate owners of their workers' wives and children, as well as the right to form rural peasant leagues or unions. Occasionally they were successful in resisting estate owner demands. Outcomes of rural conflicts depended largely on the shifting political alliances of the moment supporting the national government. By the 1950s, in spite of many vicissitudes in the fortunes of those fighting for greater rights of the rural poor, private land ownership did not imply the same degree of arbitrary power by large estate owners as it had earlier (Loveman, 1976; Affonso et al., 1970).

At the same time, a new class of entrepreneurial farmers was slowly emerging in several agricultural regions. These capitalist farmers often found it more profitable to adopt modern capital-intensive technologies, to depend largely on a non-resident workforce paid mostly in cash (a dubious benefit for workers, given persistent inflation) and to subdivide big estates into smaller operating units. Some were members of old landowning families, but others were relative newcomers associated with emerging markets and agro-industries. The SNA in the 1950s and 1960s no longer represented only traditional *hacienda* owners, but also modern commercial farmers, who frequently had divergent views about priorities. The latter tended to be less hostile than the former to labour standards and other modifications of traditional arbitrary rights associated with private ownership of large landholdings. Some of these commercial large- and medium-sized farmers supported limited land reform aimed at breaking up traditional large quasi-feudal estates.

Since the late nineteenth century, the Chilean oligarchy had used formal democratic institutions, such as popular elections for the presidency and legislature, to help resolve many intra-elite conflicts for control of the state's resources and patronage. There had been several interruptions in electoral processes, but by Latin American standards Chile during much of the first six decades of the twentieth century boasted one of the region's few functioning multi-party political systems. The electorate was courted by political parties and populist leaders (who often bought their votes). It had been gradually broadened to include large sections of the urban middle- and working-classes. Until the electoral reform of 1958 that introduced the secret ballot for rural voters, however, the landed rural oligarchy could effectively control the votes of its workers, tenants and other clients.

In this context, electoral competition had contributed to significant political and socio-economic gains by the urban popular and middle classes, but to a much smaller degree by the rural poor. Mineral exports had been the principal source of foreign exchange since the late nineteenth century. By the early 1950s over two thirds of the population was classified as being urban. Labour, trade and professional unions had become legal, well organized and influential in the cities and mines. In agriculture, however, workers' unions and other forms of peasant organization remained illegal until the mid-1960s. Public services such as schools and health clinics penetrated the countryside very slowly in comparison with their rapid improvement in cities and towns. Nonetheless, they had spread to many rural towns and villages by 1950 — an increasing bureaucratic presence of the central government in rural areas that large landowners found very difficult to control. Strikes and other forms of conflict between estate owners and their labour force, as well as with members of smallholding communities, had surged earlier during the popular front administration of the late 1930s. This eventually led to outlawing of the Communist Party from 1948 to 1958. Repression failed to smother rural strikes and conflicts, however, as the Communists continued underground activities while other leftist parties and affiliated unions agitated and organized more openly in rural areas. Moreover, progressive elements in the Catholic Church in the early 1950s also supported peasant demands for better wages, working conditions and social services, as well as for more equitable access to land.

The outgoing Ibáñez administration legalized the Communist party again in 1958. It also introduced the rural electoral reform proposed by the Christian Democrats with the support of leftist and centrist parties. Presidential elections later that year resulted in a close three-way contest between the rightist parties, whose candidate barely won a plurality, the Christian Democrats and the Leftist Popular Action Front (FRAP) candidates. The strong showing of the Socialist-Communist coalition in rural areas demonstrated that the large landowners could no longer control the votes of their tenants and workers. The Christian Democrats and the FRAP had both promised agrarian reform. Moreover, a last-minute populist candidate had barely taken enough votes from the FRAP to deny it a plurality. The election left the propertied classes shaken, as well as many foreign investors and the US embassy. The conservative coalition barely won the presidency in 1958. It had only one third of the popular vote, while the other two thirds had gone to candidates proposing some kind of land reform.

The first timid land reform legislation had been enacted in 1928 following several years of peasant protests and other signs of rural social unrest. An agricultural colonization agency (*Caja de Colonización Agrícola*) was established with the mission of creating rural settlements of small farmers to absorb unemployed rural workers and others demanding better access to land. The *Caja* was authorized to purchase estates offered for sale in order to subdivide them into family-sized units. These, in turn, would be offered for sale at attractive prices to settlers, who were to be provided with credit and infrastructure together with technical and marketing assistance. The *Caja* also had legal authority to expropriate certain abandoned or poorly worked large estates, but these powers were not used because it never had sufficient funds to purchase and subdivide more than a fraction of the lands available on the market and lands already held by the state. Following its creation in 1928 until the agrarian reform law of 1962, the *Caja* had settled some 3,500 beneficiaries — an average of about 100 colonists per year — many of whom were neither landless nor near landless. This market-oriented land reform agency had been unable to make a dent in the core agrarian issue, but it did provide the Chilean state with over three decades of experience with resettlement programmes, as well as a rudimentary legal and institutional framework for subsequent land reforms in the 1960s and early 1970s. It also established the principle of state intervention in reallocating agricultural property rights from estate owners to small producers.

The Alessandri administration enacted a land reform law in 1962. It enabled the state to expropriate abandoned or poorly managed large estates as well as various other categories of land — such as part of those lands irrigated by publicly financed projects, estates held by public agencies and lands deemed essential to the public interest because of environmental values — and their redistribution in "economic units" to smallholders. It also permitted partial payment in cash to expropriated owners, with deferred payment of the remainder in government bonds. This required a constitutional amendment that was not approved until 1963.

The 1962 agrarian reform law did not result in much land reform during the two remaining years of the Alessandri administration. No poorly worked estates were actually expropriated. Estates that were voluntarily sold by their owners usually received prices lower than were asked but far above tax-assessed values. A few large estates owned by government agencies were also subdivided. Some of these purchased and public agency-held estates were allocated to beneficiaries in "economic units" estimated to be sufficient for profitable family-operated farms. Some of the land was allocated in (larger) medium-sized commercial units. Other areas were allocated to estate workers and tenants in sub-subsistence house and garden plots, with the new owners still dependent on wage labour for a major portion of their income.

Of a projected 12,000 beneficiaries from 1962 to 1964, only a little over 1,000 actually received land. This led many critical observers, including this author, to qualify it as a "flowerpot reform". But critics failed to recognize the importance of the Alessandri reform. It institutionalized several fundamental changes in rural power relationships that would be used by the subsequent Christian Democrat administration to implement a much more radical land reform programme. The 1962 law transformed the agricultural colonization agency into an Agrarian Reform Corporation (CORA) with legal powers of expropriation with deferred payments. A parallel agency — Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (INDAP) —

was created to provide credit and assistance to smallholders, who constituted a major portion of the rural poor. Agrarian courts were established to resolve conflicts between expropriated estate owners and the state. The Alessandri land reform led to minimal changes in land tenure from 1962 to 1964, but the stage was set for much more profound land reform when the state perceived a political imperative to pursue it.

The principal actors in bringing about this first land reform law included diverse groups of peasants and rural worker activists allied with urban-based labour unions and leftist political parties, as well as progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. A Church-sponsored NGO — Instituto de Promoción Agraria (INPROA) — initiated pilot land reform subdivisions on Church lands in 1960. These experiences were later incorporated into the Christian Democrats' reform project.

Fear of defeat in the 1964 election led the governing coalition of right-wing and centrist political parties to take the advocacy of land reform by their competitors very seriously and to try to undermine their popular support by advancing their own proposals. In this, they were helped by divisions among estate owners, and even more among their urban-based allies, about the desirability of defending the traditional *hacienda* system.

Another factor leading to more radical reforms was a change in the US government's policies. The new Kennedy administration in 1960 was alarmed by the initial success of the Cuban revolution and its widespread support in Latin America. It initiated the "Alliance for Progress", designed to encourage social reforms in Latin America that would help to forestall revolutionary movements. The United States promised important financial aid for reformist programmes, including agrarian reform.

The "Declaration of Punta del Este" launching the Alliance for Progress recognized the need to reform:

> unjust structures of land tenure and use, with a view to replacing latifundia and dwarf holdings by an equitable system of land tenure so that . . . the land will become for the man who works it the basis of his economic stability, the foundation of his increasing welfare and the guarantee of his freedom and dignity.

This wording was drafted by delegates from Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia and Brazil, all of whom had experienced or anticipated radical land reforms in their own countries. It had to be approved by all the member governments of the Organization of American States (OAS), however, including the United States, revolutionary Cuba and landowning oligarchy-dominated states such as Peru. By chance, I was rapporteur for the Commission at Punta del Este drafting this resolution on agrarian reform and can attest to the difficulties in finding an acceptable wording. The declaration did not commit any signatory to concrete action, but it provided a certain international legitimacy for those in member countries advocating land reforms. Also, it held out the incentive of increased US aid. Undoubtedly, these factors played an important role in the Alessandri government's decision to adopt its land reform law of 1962, and later for the more radical Christian Democrat administration law of 1967.

The Christian Democrats headed by Eduardo Frei could only win the 1964 Chilean presidential election with the support of the centrist and right-wing parties that had constituted the previous Alessandri administration. They had been persuaded to support Frei's candidature in spite of his promise of radical land and other reforms because of the high probability that the Socialist-Communist coalition would win if the right fielded its own candidate. US diplomats and investors played an important role in the political manoeuvres leading to the Christian Democrats' electoral victory in 1964.

The new administration introduced legislation designed to reform the country's land tenure system much more drastically than permitted by the Alessandri agrarian reform law. Estates larger than the equivalent of 80 hectares of good irrigated land were subject to expropriation, but their owners could reserve up to 40 hectares for themselves. It also introduced a new labour code to facilitate organization of rural workers' and peasants' unions, and to improve labour standards and social services in the countryside. While these laws were being prepared and debated, the government implemented existing legislation fully to advance land reform. The Alessandri agrarian reform law was used to expropriate some 500 large extensively-used privately owned estates pending approval of the new land reform legislation. Several estates still held by public agencies were designated for agrarian reform programmes. INDAP actively encouraged smallholders' co-operatives and associations, providing technical assistance and credit. Labour department inspectors were instructed to enforce regulations on rural estates and to investigate worker and peasant petitions. The police were no longer readily available to break rural strikers or to dismantle agricultural worker unions at estate owners' requests. The new land and labour laws were not adopted until 1967, but a more radical land reform programme was well under way earlier.

By 1970 over 1,300 large estates (over 3 million hectares) had been expropriated, benefiting some 20,000 workers and peasants. But this was only one fifth the number of beneficiaries that had been promised by the Frei administration in its electoral campaign. Moreover, the state had no clear programme concerning the new land tenure structure to emerge from the reform. As a transitional measure, most expropriated estates were jointly administered by representatives of the agrarian reform corporation and by committees elected by their former workers and tenants. These administrative units or *asentamientos* usually coincided with the expropriated estates. After a transition period of about five years, the beneficiary tenants and workers would have the option of receiving legal title to the land as co-operative properties or in individual holdings. Where the workers and tenants were well organized with dynamic leadership they often had important participation in managing the *asentamientos*. In other expropriated estates, however, CORA functionaries played a dominant role.

The Popular Unity (UP) coalition of socialists, communists and other left-wing parties won a narrow plurality in the 1970 presidential election. Unlike in 1964, the rightist parties and Christian Democrats had both fielded candidates. The UP picked up crucial support in rural areas with its promise for more rapid and radical land reform. The Allende administration, however, did not have a majority in the legislature, which meant that it could not enact new legislation to implement its "socialist" programme. The government decided to exploit the earlier land reform and labour legislation already in place to the fullest extent possible. The UP coalition vigorously promoted the political mobilization and organization of rural

workers and peasants and supported their demands for land. Within two years the government had expropriated nearly all the remaining large estates. In addition, rural union membership, which had already expanded from a few thousand to 140,000 in the 1964-1970 period, jumped to 210,000 by 1972.

The Allende administration faced the same dilemma as its predecessor of how to transfer the expropriated land to a socially differentiated and partially mobilized peasantry. The expropriated estates accounted for about 36 per cent of the country's farm land and for 30 per cent of its total agricultural output, but only employed about one fifth of the entire agricultural workforce. Many of these workers did not reside in the expropriated estates but in rural communities with insufficient land for self-provisioning. These part-time estate workers and other smallholders comprised about three fifths of the agricultural population. Moreover, some residents within the estates farmed small areas temporarily allocated to them as partial payment for their labour on the estate. Many others had no access to land for their own use, and others were sharecroppers or renters of estate lands producing primarily for the market. Most of the estates had centralized infrastructure such as irrigation systems, buildings and machinery that could not be readily subdivided for the use of family farms. Different categories of estate workers tended to have divergent views about whether the land should be subdivided into family-sized parcels or worker-managed co-operatives. Workers residing elsewhere also wanted to receive land, but estate residents naturally resisted taking in outsiders as beneficiaries. These differences in perceived interests were frequently reinforced by divergent ideological positions taken by political parties and factions within them.

The UP's answer to these conflicts of interest and of perceptions was essentially the same as that of the Christian Democrats earlier. The expropriated estates were jointly managed by elected workers' committees together with CORA technicians. These units were called Agrarian Reform Centres (CERAS) instead of *asentamientos*. A few state farms were also created. As before, there were wide differences in the real degree of worker participation. This depended largely on such factors as the degree of peasant organization and the quality of its leadership as well as on the capacity of the state bureaucracy. In theory, the CERAS were supposed eventually to evolve into larger decentralized, democratic planning and production units that could absorb many of the rural landless and near landless not residing within the expropriated estates. This never happened, and it is doubtful that it could have. In any event, the reform process was abruptly halted by the 1973 military coup.

Following the coup, some of the expropriated land was returned to its former owners on the legal basis of irregularities in expropriation procedures. The rest was assigned to individual beneficiaries in family-sized holdings, who had the obligation to meet annual interest and amortization payments. A large portion of the beneficiaries soon had to sell in the absence of adequate state credits and technical assistance. Nonetheless, the country's agrarian structure had been radically transformed. The large estates had nearly disappeared, while smallholders controlled one third of the land — in contrast to only one tenth a decade earlier. Medium-sized capitalist farms, worked mostly by a non-resident labour force, dominated the Chilean agrarian structure in the 1980s and 1990s after the counter-reform.

The protests and demands of peasants and other rural workers, supported by labour unions and other urban allies, were principal factors in bringing about land reform in Chile. Only a small minority of the peasantry actively agitated and organized as long as estate owners were able to maintain their monopoly of land ownership and the control of the state's rural institutions, including, especially, its police powers. This activist minority, however, enjoyed the latent if timorous sympathies of a large proportion of the rural poor. When the state's frequently changing governing coalitions shared power with leftist urban-based parties, however, the rural oligarchy's political power was progressively weakened (over a period of nearly five decades) even while it maintained the ownership of most agricultural land. After the 1958 electoral reform, the competition of political parties for the support of rural voters became a major mechanism accelerating the land reform process. Urban-based labour unions and other NGOs, such as progressive church groups, contributed in close collaboration with political parties. Growing urbanization and the expansion of capital-intensive commercial agriculture also played a major role in weakening the traditional estate owners' position.

Chilean and foreign intellectuals contributed to this land reform process. Many called attention to the inequities of the *hacienda* system and to pressures resulting in reforms of parallel land systems elsewhere. Several actively collaborated in efforts to organize rural workers, smallholders and the country's remaining indigenous communities. The synergy between intellectual perceptions, research and communication of ideas and information, on the one hand, and praxis, on the other, is widely recognized, but disentangling them is virtually impossible.

The United Nations and other international organizations contributed to the reform process, although their roles were usually marginal compared to those of domestic social actors. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) published several reports in the 1950s calling for land reforms in Latin America in order to remove a major obstacle to national development. The Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development (ICAD) released its report **Tenencia de la tierra y desarrollo del sector agrícola — Chile** in 1963. This research was one of seven country case studies I co-ordinated. It was carried out by national researchers with financial support and technical help from five organizations (OAS, IICA, IDB, ECLAC and FAO). The Chilean report strongly recommended land reform. But these findings would have fallen on deaf ears or been suppressed, as happened in Guatemala and some other countries, if the Chilean political context had not been receptive. In the Chilean case, the report was published by CORA and used politically to show international support for the new land reform programme.

The activities of ICIRA, supported by FAO/UNDP financial resources and technical assistance, and by UNESCO and the ILO, illustrate some of the opportunities and limitations for international organization support of land reform. It commenced organizing practical training courses for government extension agents, agrarian officials and peasant organization leaders in 1964. It recruited an outstanding Spanish legal specialist to assist in drafting the Frei administration's agrarian reform law. An exiled former Minister of Labour from Brazil did the same for the new legislation facilitating and regulating rural labour unions. ICIRA specialists in farm management, co-operatives, credit, social relations, new communications technologies, rural education, irrigation, marketing and various other fields were able to help Chilean teams develop their own programmes. It also

served as a co-ordinating centre for numerous NGO and bilateral technical assistance programmes for land reform. By 1972, ICIRA programmes of technical assistance, training and research were active in support of CORA, INDAP and several other government agencies wherever land reform was being implemented.

Soon after the Pinochet military coup, the whole land reform support programme was closed down. Many participants were jailed, exiled or worse. The international agencies supporting it simply dropped land reform from their agenda in Chile.

As was seen above, the Kennedy administration played a key role through the "Alliance for Progress" in convincing the Chilean government to adopt its 1962 land reform law. This was followed by the more radical Frei administration legislation. The Nixon administration in the United States, however, was overtly hostile to parts of the Frei administration's reform programme that it deemed to be collectivist or Marxist-oriented. It actively worked subsequently to destabilize the Allende government. United States support was crucial for the success of the Pinochet-led military coup that terminated the Chilean land reform programme.

◆ Peru

In rural Peru large estates first established in the sixteenth century still dominated the agrarian structure in the early 1960s in much the same way as in many other parts of Latin America. Large, modern irrigated plantations in the coastal region producing sugar, rice and a few other commercial crops had a long history of union organization and labour conflicts. Big *haciendas* controlled most of the highlands. Like in Bolivia, the indigenous rural residents were serfs on the highland estates or had been relegated to communities on poorer lands. There were continuous conflicts between estate owners and the largely self-provisioning indigenous communities. Land occupations by *communeros* reclaiming lost territories had become frequent. Most of the highland estates provided low economic returns and were technologically backwards. In the eastern valleys descending to the Amazon basin there were a few relatively profitable large plantations of tea, coffee, cacao and other export crops. The production of illegal coca was also expanding. This increasing commercialization of agriculture in the valleys had been accompanied by frequent conflicts between estate owners and mostly indigenous tenants, sub-tenants, workers and neighbouring smallholders.

By 1960 the army was engaged in numerous operations against peasant guerrillas in much of the country. A prolonged violent struggle in one of the eastern valleys, La Convención, had led the military government in 1962 to impose a small land reform there. It benefited most of the better off tenants but practically excluded the majority of the rural poor. Nonetheless, it helped to quell guerrilla activity in the region, at least temporarily. Peasant strikes and land occupations had provoked this mini-reform, but army officers and professionals from the Ministry of Agriculture planned and implemented it. These military and civilian professionals were mostly of middle-class *mestizo* origins with little sympathy for the large landowners, who were mostly of European descent. The large estates were partially expropriated with deferred compensation for their owners The indigenous tenants with labour obligations to the estates received the units they had been cultivating, while some sub-tenants and other workers received small plots and others were left landless. This experience was successful in contributing to pacification from the army's viewpoint and was a prelude to the bigger reform later.

Following a brief period of civilian government from 1964 to 1968 the military again took control of the state. It announced a nationalist development programme that included a radical land reform. General Velasco Alverado, the new President, cited the recommendations for land reform of the ICAD report on land tenure and agricultural development in Peru that had been published in 1966 by the Pan-American Union, as one of the government's justifications for the planned land reform.

In an interview with four visiting "land reform specialists" in 1969, General Velasco explained that the principal objective of the reform was to speed up transition of Peru to a more modern and socially integrated society. He hoped this could be accomplished in Peru without a bloody civil war such as the one that had killed over a million Mexicans in that country's earlier agrarian transition. We questioned whether this could be done by government decree.

Urbanization had been proceeding rapidly in Peru, with the proportion of the population in rural areas decreasing from nearly two thirds in 1950 to a little less

than one half in 1970. Successive national governments had pursued cheap food policies supported by subsidized food imports from the United States in order to feed the urban poor. This depressed domestic food prices. It was particularly damaging for peasant producers who had little access to the easy credits and low-cost imports available for large estate owners. Cheap food policies contributed to growing rural unrest, as did the expansion of large-scale export agriculture which often appropriated the peasantry's customary land and water resources.

The Velasco government expropriated nearly all the large estates in Peru. These included one third of the country's land and one fifth of its farm workforce. An initial attempt to convert expropriated estates into worker-managed co-operatives eventually petered out. Falling prices for agricultural export commodities in the 1970s left most modern, large capital-intensive units unprofitable. Large-scale centralized management of traditional highland estates was no more remunerative when carried on by workers' committees and state technicians than it had been before reform. Moreover, neighbouring indigenous communities that were supposed to share the profits from the land reform co-operatives seldom received any, because there were seldom any profits to distribute.

The reform accelerated the disintegration of Peru's quasi-feudal *hacienda* system. By the 1980s, it had been largely replaced by small- and medium-sized farm units. The peasant mobilization to form rural unions and co-operatives stimulated by the Velasco government was short-lived once he disappeared. After the reform, rural Peru continued to be plagued by guerrilla activities in many regions. These were associated with continued extreme widespread rural poverty, depressed prices for peasant food crops and a booming Mafia-controlled export market for illegal coca. In this context, the land tenure system remained chaotic, with many unresolved conflicts between and among land reform beneficiaries, indigenous communities, and other claimants of land and water rights.

In contrast to the reforms in Chile and several of the other countries mentioned earlier, professional army officers were key actors in bringing about the Peruvian reform. These officers were usually of mixed European and indigenous ancestry and frequently were recruited from the urban middle classes or from rural landholding families who were not part of the traditional oligarchy. Most resented the racial discrimination of the old rural aristocracy. Moreover, counter-insurgency training by the United States had contributed to the spread of many modernization ideals in the armed forces, as well as to a greater appreciation of the social origins of peasant unrest. Unfortunately, US military training had not done the same for ideals of democratic participation and a respect for human rights. Without the reform, however, the land issue would have been even more contentious than it was in the 1980s and 1990s.

◆ Nicaragua and El Salvador

The most recent important land reforms in Latin America took place in these two Central American countries during the 1980s. Both were stimulated by revolutionary insurgencies that had generated significant support from peasants and rural workers demanding land, or better wages and working conditions. Land ownership in both countries had been highly concentrated, mostly in large export crop-oriented estates. Land ownership was much more skewed in densely populated El Salvador than in land-abundant Nicaragua. In both countries, agro-

export booms had disrupted the livelihoods of the peasantry and displaced large numbers from their customary lands. The latest export boom ended in the 1970s, intensifying rural unrest. Also, both countries had a long history of peasant insurgency. In 1932, the army in El Salvador slaughtered over 20,000 peasants and rural workers who were demanding land and better wages.

In Nicaragua land reform followed the military victory of the Sandinista rebel forces in 1979. Properties of the ousted Somoza dictatorship were seized and initially converted into state enterprises. These confiscated estates included about one fifth of the country's agricultural land. Many private estate owners were required to make idle land available to landless peasants for self-provisioning at nominal rents, while wages and working conditions were improved under state and union pressures. The reform was extended to include expropriation of other large estates in the early 1980s, as well as to provide titles to squatters and tenants in frontier regions for the land they occupied. If one includes provisional titles granted to squatters on state lands, by 1986 nearly half the agricultural land and half the rural population had been included in the reform. About 12 per cent of the expropriated land was in state farms, the rest in co-operative or individual smallholdings.

The Nicaraguan Rural Workers' Federation (ATC), and the Small Farmers' Organization (UNAG) that was created in 1981, played active roles in pushing the land reform. Both were associated with the Sandinista party (FSLN) but enjoyed considerable autonomy in formulating their demands, especially UNAG. Sandinista officials and professionals were, of course, key players. The Centre for Agrarian Reform Research and Studies (CIERA) played a similar role to that of ICIRA in Chile in attempting to monitor the land reform process, to analyse problems and to suggest possible solutions as well as to communicate its findings to state officials, peasant leaders and the general public.

The land reform process in Nicaragua was necessarily subordinated to the Sandinistas' struggle for political survival in the face of increasing United States hostility. The United States organized and financed invading insurgent forces (*contras*) as well as equipping and instructing them in "low intensity" warfare. These included many of the defeated Somoza national guards, who reorganized with US logistic support in neighbouring countries. The United States also imposed a strict economic embargo. Both sides competed to obtain the support of discontented peasants. This often accelerated land reform initiatives by the government, but the war generally undermined any economic benefits that might have ensued from reform for the peasants.

Foreign and domestic NGOs and solidarity groups were active in support of the reform, but with highly variable effectiveness. Eastern bloc and Western European economic aid helped offset the damage caused by the US embargo and the US-supported "low intensity" warfare (Barraclough et al., 1988). But it was a losing battle. The Sandinistas won a democratic election in 1984, but they lost in 1990. A decade of hardship with heavy war casualties, two periods of hyperinflation, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and a well-financed campaign by an opposition coalition advised by some of the world's top electoral propaganda specialists had left voters with little hope for a better future unless the US-backed candidate won.

As in the Chilean case, the role of international organizations in support of the land reform was mixed. Most offered some technical assistance and other help, especially in the reform's early stages. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), for example, provided a loan to support a land reform-linked rural development project with the prospect of financing a larger package of similar projects. When the United States imposed an embargo, however, IFAD funding abruptly stopped. Agencies such as the WFP, the UNDP, UNICEF, the FAO and several others continued some assistance programmes, but with many difficulties and hesitations. In 1991, when the new government gave priority to supporting larger private producers, including transnational investors in agro-industries, international agencies followed the government's lead. Land reform beneficiaries and their co-operatives found themselves virtually without access to credit, technical assistance or good markets after 1990, although a few NGOs valiantly continued to try to help them. Some agrarian reform co-operatives have survived with NGO help, but others disintegrated. Many indebted land reform beneficiaries lost their land, but land ownership remains more equitable than it was before the reform.

In El Salvador, the 1980 land reform law followed a 1979 military coup by progressive officers. The United States strongly supported this land reform. In fact, it was drafted with the help of US advisors and imposed on a reluctant oligarchy under US pressures. The United States hoped the land reform would help pacify the rebellious countryside. Some 400 large estates (over 500 hectares each), including one fourth of the country's agricultural land, were expropriated and assigned to their workers as production co-operatives. On average, co-operative members had rights to land amounting to about eight hectares each. These beneficiaries, however, made up only 7 per cent of the agricultural labour force.

The second phase of the reform that would have expropriated land in 12,000 estates between 150 and 500 hectares each (55 per cent of all farm land) was never implemented due to opposition from the traditional oligarchy and changing US priorities. Phase III provided land titles for poor tenants. Some 65,000 small tenants became "owners", often at the expense of other small proprietors rather than of large land owners. These beneficiaries received an average of 1.5 hectares each of mostly poor-quality land. The land reform had benefited less than one fifth of the rural labour force and included a little over one fourth of the agricultural area (Barraclough and Scott, 1987).

The land reform co-operatives were burdened with heavy debts for the assessed value of the land, machinery, infrastructure and operating capital they received. The government's espousal of neo-liberal policies after the mid-1980s, combined with deteriorating terms of trade, left most of the co-operatives insolvent. If debts had been divided among their members, they would have remained non-payable. Most of the rural population remained landless or near landless. The peace process implied that many thousands of former government soldiers and ex-guerrilla fighters were seeking land and employment, as in Nicaragua after 1990. In El Salvador, however, remittances from migrants to the US together with substantial new foreign investments and liberal US economic aid helped to generate an expanding economy. Even so, access to land remained a serious and highly conflictive issue. Without the land reform, however, the peace agreement would probably have been delayed much longer than it was.

THE PRINCIPAL ACTORS IN RECENT LAND REFORMS

As can be seen from the cases discussed above, each agrarian reform process was different. Experiences with land reforms in other parts of the world reinforce this conclusion. Nevertheless, a few broad generalizations seem possible.

◆ Contradictory Role of the State

In every Latin American case where significant land redistribution benefiting the rural poor took place, the state played a decisive role. As emphasized in the introduction, this is almost a definitional truism. The state had also been instrumental in preventing land reform earlier, and in deforming it later to the advantage of non-poor social groups. The state's role was different in each stage of a country's land reform process, as well as from one country to another. It depended on a host of internal and external factors. The agrarian structure before reform, the nature of the state and of its principal support groups, the degrees of peasant and rural worker mobilization and organization, and the terms of insertion of the country into the global system were only a few of the important ones. One has to take these factors and many others into account in order to explain why these land reforms succeeded at least partially and temporarily. Similarly, they help explain why no significant land reforms have yet taken place in countries such as Brazil and many others where land concentration, rural poverty and exploitation of the peasantry were every bit as bad as they were in the cases summarized earlier.

In Mexico, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua, land reform accompanied social revolutions in which insurgent political forces seized state power with wide popular support. The social forces driving these revolutions varied. Peasant insurrections for restitution of lost lands and protesting against abuses by quasi-feudal landlords were decisive in initiating land reforms in Mexico and Bolivia, and in contributing to post-revolutionary land reform in Cuba and Nicaragua. All of these peasant struggles for land were linked with urban-based middle-class nationalist and anti-imperialist movements. They were also fuelled by struggles for control of state power among competing elites. But the nationalist element was much stronger in relatively developed Cuba than in pauperized Bolivia; in the latter, resentment of centuries of racial discrimination was a powerful force in mobilizing the peasantry.

These observations about land reforms accompanying social revolutions are consistent with the processes leading to two of the most massive revolutionary land reforms of the mid-twentieth century: China and Viet Nam. In China the success of the Communist revolution largely hinged on the impotency of the nationalist government to resist the Japanese invasion and its inability to respond to peasant demands after Japan's subsequent defeat in the Second World War. Peasant movements provided the major social forces fuelling the Communist uprising that had commenced in the 1920s. The Chinese land reform after the victory of Maoist armies in 1949 was the most profound and extensive in history (Shillinglaw, 1974). In Viet Nam, the land reform cannot be explained without

reference to the replacement of the French colonial power by Japan, and then the subsequent return of the French. Following the French colonial army's defeat, the South Vietnamese state was supported by the Americans, only to be defeated by the North Vietnamese Communists. The North Vietnamese state had mobilized the peasantry around its demands for land (Luu, 1982).

One must be extremely cautious, however, about generalizations that analyse revolutionary land reforms in one category and non-revolutionary reforms in another. The overlaps and contradictions within each of these categories overshadow their superficial similarities. Non-revolutionary land reforms shared numerous characteristics with the revolutionary ones mentioned above. A common ingredient of all was peasant organization and struggle for more equitable and secure access to land.

Of the Latin American cases, electoral politics were important in bringing about land reforms in Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Chile. But within these countries each process was different. The Guatemalan government's electoral support in 1950 came mainly from urban voters — most peasants still could not vote, but the Arbenz administration regarded them as potential supporters for future elections. The 1952 land reform was instigated by a democratically elected government. It was quickly reversed by a US-backed military coup. Puerto Rico was a US possession at the time of its land reform. The reform was initiated by both the elected colonial government that had sought popular electoral support from rural workers and peasants, and by the US-appointed governor. The Puerto Rican advocates of land reform had been encouraged by the US authorities administering the island for diverse ideological, political and economic reasons. Venezuela's elected government, like that of Guatemala in 1944, had replaced a repressive authoritarian dictatorship. In Venezuela, the dictator had been deposed in part by pressure from peasant union activists. Its limited "market-friendly" land reform, however, was facilitated by ample state revenues from petroleum exports. In Chile, multi-party competition for rural votes played a decisive role in placing land reform on the political agenda. The reform was stopped by a US-supported military coup.

Authoritarian military juntas had initiated serious land reforms in Peru and El Salvador. In both cases, pacification of guerrilla insurgencies with widespread peasant support had been a major objective of the state in espousing land reform. But there were also many other factors that differed somewhat in each country.

Principal actors in post-Second World War land reform processes in Asia carried out by authoritarian governments included the military and an organized peasantry, which was consistent with the Latin American cases summarized above. Two of the most successful state-directed non-revolutionary land reforms at this time took place in South Korea and Taiwan. Both had been Japanese colonies for over four decades. Following the War, South Korea was occupied by the US Army and Taiwan by Chinese nationalist forces with US help.

The reform in South Korea had been inspired in part by fear that the Communists who took power in North Korea with the help of the USSR after Japan's defeat would be able to mobilize peasant support in the South. Moreover, the South Korean post-war government had been anti-colonial, with few ties to local landlords who had often co-operated with the Japanese. A very drastic land reform

was implemented with the assistance of the United States. Land owned by Japanese colonists was distributed to former tenants and workers. A ceiling on all individual holdings throughout the country was set at three hectares of good cropland, and land in excess of this ceiling was distributed to former tenants. Rents were fixed at low levels for cultivators who did not become landowners. It is often forgotten, however, that there had been a long history of peasant organization and protest around land issues during Japanese colonial rule. This facilitated implementation of the reform with a great deal of support and participation by the beneficiaries (Lee, 1979).

In Taiwan, with US help, the Chinese nationalist government moved to the island after its 1949 defeat on the mainland. It had no obligations to Taiwanese landlords and many of its members blamed the failure to implement land reform in mainland China for its defeat by the communists. The government also wanted to avoid strengthening a Taiwanese rich farmer class that might have aspirations to form a Taiwanese state separate from China (Pearse, 1980). It promptly initiated a drastic land reform.

Taiwan had modernized its agriculture under Japanese rule to become an important exporter of sugar, rice and other foods to the colonial power. Peasant producers were relatively well organized in co-operatives and peasant associations. Demands for more equitable access to land had frequently been articulated under colonial rule (Huizer, 1980). When the Chinese Nationalist government decreed a land reform in Taiwan, it was implemented with widespread support and participation by the peasantry. The reform received important financial and technical assistance from the US government. In any case, as in South Korea, it was primarily a tenancy reform. It provided secure property rights on a very egalitarian basis to former renters and sharecroppers with very low limits set for the amount of land that could be controlled by an individual owner. (Maximum holdings were set at three hectares of paddy, and rents for remaining tenants were limited to 37.5 per cent of production.)

State-directed non-revolutionary land reforms in South Korea and Taiwan, like those following peasant-based revolutions in China and Viet Nam, made major contributions to these countries' subsequent economic and social development. But they have to be understood in their unique historical contexts. They are not easily replicable elsewhere.

In each case, the state's role in land reform was crucial. It sometimes promoted reform, sometimes prevented it, sometimes reversed it and sometimes diverted it to benefit groups other than the rural poor. The state always had some scope for autonomous policies, but the space available for changing long-established property relations was extremely circumscribed except in exceptional circumstances. In fact, a primary mission of the state was usually to protect the *status quo* in this respect, as it traditionally derived its power primarily from support of the propertied classes. The changes in state policies leading to or accompanying land reform can be explained *ex post* by the emergence of new influential social actors, such as organized peasants and workers, together with powerful allies in other sectors of society, but this explanation can easily become tautological. It has limited *ex ante* predictive value — because so many other factors intervene, there are inevitably great uncertainties. The same is true of explanations emphasizing the extreme dependency of developing countries within

the world capitalist system, although, as was seen, foreign interventions often played decisive roles in initiating or stopping reforms.

The main operational conclusion of our review of the state's role is that land reforms only occur when dominant groups among those wielding state power perceive a political imperative to adopt a popularly based development strategy that requires active support from important sectors of the rural poor. The political mobilization and organization of the rural landless and near landless is a necessary condition for land reform; but it is not a sufficient one. Poor peasants and rural workers will require powerful allies in other sectors of society, and frequently also from abroad, in order to bring about a more equitable distribution of land.

◆ Peasant Organizations

In every case where significant land reforms occurred, protests and demands by organized peasant producers and rural workers made crucial contributions to bringing them about. Peasant activists who initially agitated and organized to bring about reform were usually only a small minority among the rural poor, especially in repressive contexts, but they enjoyed wide covert and passive support. It was possible for widely different groups of the rural poor to unite in protests against the monopolization of land and abusive treatment by landlords and their allies. The big landowners could always persuade some of their tenants and workers to oppose reform through the use of patronage and threats of reprisals, but this was ineffective in the face of widespread discontent and other processes weakening their control over state policies.

Relatively autonomous and democratic participation by organized peasants in implementing land reform, however, was much more difficult to achieve and institutionalize. Even where it was approached it could rarely be maintained for long periods. It was much more difficult for the rural poor to remain united once land became available through reform. How it should be allocated and to whom, as well as how it should be managed and by whom, were inevitably conflictive issues. The more socially differentiated the rural poor were along socio-economic and ethnic lines, the more contentious these issues became. Of course, rural elites faced similar difficulties of internal divisions in maintaining a united front against land reform, but this did not make democratic participation by potential beneficiaries any easier once a reform process was underway. Several of these problems were emphasized when discussing the Chilean and other Latin American experiences earlier.

When the reform was administered by the state's bureaucracy, or by a political party on which a weak state largely depended, the issue of democratic peasant participation frequently became acute. State and party officials were often as prone to use patronage and petty corruption for dividing peasant organizations for their own ends as were private estate owners and managers or representatives of private corporations. The Mexican case, especially after 1940, is a good example.

These difficulties in approaching and institutionalizing democratic peasant participation in land reforms help to explain why the reforms seldom met the utopian expectations of some of their advocates. This does not detract from the substantial social gains for the rural poor associated with very imperfect land reforms. One has to ask what would have happened if the reforms had never taken

place. This is a counterfactual question that can never be definitively answered, but exploring it is instructive. In any event, it is naive to assume that similar abuses would not have arisen if the reform process had been administered by "civil society" organizations such as NGOs.

Peasant organizations and mobilization were an essential ingredient of all the reforms reviewed above. NGOs, international organizations and others attempting to bring about land reform should recognize this fact. They should also keep in mind that democratic and reasonably autonomous peasant organizations are necessary for institutionalizing reform and preventing it from being diverted to the benefit of others. This is an even more difficult challenge.

◆ Large Landholders

As was seen earlier, the large landowners and their allies invariably contributed to creating the conditions giving rise to struggles for land reform. This is practically a truism, as the need for land reform presupposes a highly inequitable distribution of rights and obligations in access to land among those who use it. There were always many divergent policies, interests and perceptions among large landowners, however, just as there were among the rural poor.

As was to be expected, most large landowners resisted land reform in every case examined, although in diverse degrees and by many different methods. Without large landowner resistance, land reform would not be a controversial political issue.

Where landlords maintained quasi-feudal social relationships with the rural poor, as in most of Latin America, conflicts inevitably arose with the penetration of market forces (i.e., potential profits for some groups from selling and buying in expanding national and transnational markets). Commercialization led to changes in production patterns and technologies. These contributed, in turn, to new social differentiations, to the appropriation of many of the poor's traditional land rights by large landowners or other outsiders, and to opportunities for some peasants and workers to obtain cash incomes from the sale of natural resources, products and labour if they could get rid of their customary obligations to landed elites. The 1960 revolt of peasant producers with labour obligations to large tea, coffee and cocoa producers in La Convención, Peru (mentioned earlier) was a good example of these latter conflicts, while the demands of indigenous communities for restitution of lost lands in Mexico and Bolivia illustrated the former.

Where some large producers found it profitable to adopt modern capital-intensive technologies, they had less need for a big resident workforce. Instead, it was more profitable to recruit seasonal workers while taking for their own commercial use the land previously allocated to resident tenants in return for labour services and part of their produce to the estate. This process was particularly evident in central Chile in the 1950s. It helped create a context favourable for land reform. Similar processes leading to conflicting goals among large landowners were noted in all the cases reviewed earlier. Moreover, several large landowners became convinced intellectually of the need for land reform. Travel and education sometimes led to an appreciation of historical processes affecting agrarian structures that could be better understood by progressive estate owners, who stood to lose traditional prerogatives by reform, than by urban intellectuals.

Such contradictions among estate owners were reflected by divisions within large landholders' organizations and associations, such as the SNA in Chile. They seldom were able to present a united front when political pressures for land reform mounted. Moreover, as urbanization and industrialization proceeded, landholding oligarchies became relatively less influential in national affairs. Many diversified their assets and activities to other sectors such as industry, finance and commerce while retaining a near monopoly of agricultural land in one or several rural localities. This helped them maintain local-level power. It also diluted their political clout nationally when faced with growing demands for land reform, as they had to take into account their own and their urban allies' frequently contradictory non-agricultural interests.

The processes associated with increasing marketization, technological modernization and social differentiation affected both landowning elites and the rural poor in many contradictory ways. Based on the evidence from the cases reviewed above, they accelerated land reforms in some contexts and retarded them in others. It would be a mistake to conclude that "globalization" in the late twentieth century has left land reform an anachronism. On the contrary, in many developing countries land tenure issues are becoming increasingly acute in the face of growing social polarization, widespread poverty and the absence of alternative employment opportunities for the rural poor. The many divergent interests among the rural poor make their struggle for land reform difficult. The increasingly divergent interests among landholding elites, however, present new opportunities for bringing about land reforms that could benefit the rural landless and near landless.

There was no evidence from the cases reviewed above that effective land reforms could result from "market friendly" policies alone. Registering land titles and facilitating real estate transactions between willing sellers and willing buyers do not by themselves change power relationships in favour of the rural poor. In many situations, such policies are likely to reinforce inequitable agrarian structures by providing large landholders and speculators with additional legal protection, while leaving the bargaining power of the poor unchanged or diminished.

◆ Political Parties

Political parties played a prominent role in the land reforms reviewed above. This is to be expected in what is primarily a political process. Their roles varied widely, however, in different political systems.

In formally democratic states with functioning multi-party systems immediately before and during land reform, competition for the votes of the rural poor and others who might benefit from a redistribution of rights to land was important in placing land reform high on the political agenda. This was especially the case with the reforms in Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Chile. Political parties openly competed for electoral support by promising land reform. They often actively promoted peasant and rural worker organizations with political goals. In this they were helped by urban-based labour unions affiliated or allied with political parties. Land reform laws were enacted by elected legislatures after open debate and many compromises with diverse parties and factions. The Chilean case in the 1960s and early 1970s was a good example.

In more authoritarian political systems, open party competition for popular support was outlawed or severely constrained. Nonetheless, political parties invariably played a role. If genuine opposition parties were outlawed, which was frequently the case, leftist parties still agitated and organized clandestinely. This usually increased pressures on the regime to support some kind of land reform. Moreover, authoritarian military regimes were often far from monolithic. Competing officers frequently sought populist support, which sometimes led them to undertake rather radical land reforms. This was notably the case with the 1969 Velasco Alverado regime in Peru, the 1979 military junta in El Salvador and the Chinese nationalist government's reform in Taiwan.

Regimes that came to power as a result of popularly based revolutionary movements, such as those that emerged in Mexico, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Cuba, China and Viet Nam, were politically committed to rather radical land reforms. They needed to consolidate their popular support in the countryside. These regimes' commitments to the aspirations and welfare of the rural poor were constrained and diluted by competing social forces and priorities once the revolutionary party was firmly in control, but the revolutionary political party was invariably a leading actor both in carrying out land reform and in its subsequent evolution.

Effective land reforms have never been primarily technocratic exercises. Their realization always required the active participation of political parties or surrogate political organizations. A non-political land reform would be an oxymoron.

◆ NGOs

Non-governmental organizations constitute an extremely mixed assortment of social actors. Their name suggests not what they are but what they are not. They are commonly considered to be non-state and not-for-profit organizations with the aim of advancing particular social, cultural or economic interests. What they are and what they do in practice obviously depends on specific historical circumstances as does the content of the complementary concept of "civil society".

The dividing lines between NGOs and state-controlled or sponsored organizations, as well as between civil society and the state or the market, tend to be exceedingly blurred in practice. For purposes of assessing NGOs' roles in land reforms, we are especially interested in those NGOs ostensibly dedicated to improving the welfare of the rural poor and in promoting other aspects of sustainable rural development.

In some contexts, peasant associations, large landowners' societies, co-operatives, workers' unions, religious and professional organizations, consumers' societies and the like are considered to be NGOs, while in others they may be regarded by critics as being agents of the state or of the market. Special attention is paid here to self-proclaimed national and international "charities" and similar NGOs supposedly dedicated to social development, environmental protection and other humanitarian goals.

Such NGOs were active in all the land reforms mentioned earlier. Their roles tended to be peripheral to those of the state, political parties and popularly based non-state organizations, such as peasant associations and rural workers' unions. NGOs, however, were sometimes able to play important catalytic roles. They contributed through advocacy as well as technical and material support for popularly based movements and organizations involved in land reform. The league of socialist agronomists in Mexico made important contributions to the initial success of several collective *ejidos*, for example. INPROA's experience in transforming church-owned estates into peasant co-operatives provided an important input into the Christian Democrat administration's agrarian reform in Chile. During the Pinochet dictatorship, NGOs often played a vital role in Chile by providing some assistance to land reform beneficiaries that had been virtually abandoned by the state agencies previously helping them. NGO activities proliferated in post-land reform Bolivia, Nicaragua and El Salvador. But the contribution of NGOs was by no means always positive or effective for the rural poor.

When the state was actively attempting to implement or guide popularly based land reforms — as in Mexico in the 1930s, in Bolivia and Guatemala in the early 1950s, Cuba and Venezuela in the early 1960s, Chile and Peru in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and Nicaragua in the early 1980s — it was relatively easy for NGOs to contribute to these programmes. Some had reservations about many aspects of state policies, but they shared the goals of helping the rural poor to obtain improved access to land and better livelihoods. National NGOs were able to mobilize locally available capacities of students, technicians, professionals, researchers and many others to provide technical assistance, legal aid, training courses and other resources in support of reform processes. They complemented and supplemented the efforts of grassroots organizations and state agencies. International NGOs were able to do the same by working through state agencies, local NGOs and peasant-based organizations. They also often brought badly needed material help and technical expertise from abroad, and helped inform governments and public opinion in their home countries about reform aims, accomplishments and difficulties. As the state was attempting to lead and direct the reform process, it was able to co-ordinate disparate NGO activities sufficiently to give them a semblance of coherence. Some NGOs were professional and competent in their efforts while others were clumsy and ineffective, but they were components of an ongoing process in which civil society and the state tended to blend.

During conflictive and often chaotic land reform processes, there were always some NGOs attempting to slow or reverse state-supported land reform programmes. Frequently they were financed by sources at home or abroad that were opposed to reforming established land tenure systems for the benefit of the rural poor. They often shared political and ideological orientations with traditional landed elites, or with would-be modernizing elites hoping to replace them but that were marginalized by the actual changes taking place. To the extent that the state was able to maintain a reasonably coherent programme that was popularly based, their disruptive initiatives could be subordinated to the land reform process. Sometimes they called attention to abuses and weaknesses in state-supported programmes that were subsequently corrected. Frequently, however, such NGOs strengthened counter-reform movements. These NGOs often contributed to the weakening or replacement of regimes committed to improving the livelihoods of the rural poor as rapidly as possible through land reform and complementary policies.

In situations where state policies were overtly hostile to land reform, or at best contradictory and ambivalent in regard to the needs and aspirations of the rural poor, NGOs with sincere humanitarian and sustainable development goals faced other dilemmas. The state did not perceive peasants or the rural landless as crucial supporters, but it was extremely sensitive to the demands of large landholders who constituted a major support group. Should NGOs vigorously advocate land reform at the risk of being expelled from rural areas and of exposing to possibly fatal reprisals the popularly based organizations with which they worked? Or should they accept the agrarian structure in which they had to operate and try to deliver technical assistance, credit, health and educational services to a few groups in need of them, knowing full well that their limited resources and their political impotence could make little difference for most of the poor unless the agrarian structure was reformed? Should they concentrate their scant resources on local-level micro-projects of relief and income generation that could possibly show positive results for a few beneficiaries? Or should they use their limited resources to support peasant and worker organizations, and to publicize problems of human rights abuses, corruption, exploitation by landlords, merchants and state officials? Was not there a danger that by helping only a few of the poor this could reduce the militancy of broad-based peasant and landless worker movements by dividing them? If a small minority of the poor with NGO help could benefit within the existing land tenure system, would not many others conclude that their principal problem was not due to exploitive institutions and elite-biased policies, but to insufficient aid and charity? Moreover, in conflictive and socially polarized contexts, would not the bulk of NGO resources be diverted to strengthen the power of local elites through appropriation and redistribution along clientelistic lines?

Each situation was different. The actions of NGOs largely depended on their assessments of present possibilities and future prospects. Sometimes NGOs made significant contributions toward increasing the awareness of peasant organizations, influential sectors of public opinion, political leaders and sympathetic state officials of the need for land reform and the possibilities for bringing it about. Often their efforts may have inadvertently weakened peasant and worker movements pressing for institutional and policy reforms, and sometimes exposed them to brutal reprisals. Much depended on the dedication, skill and courage of

well-intentioned NGOs, as well as upon the context. And much depended on chance.

NGOs operated under many constraints that inevitably influenced their judgements about priorities and possibilities. In the first place, they depended upon host-country governments for their legitimacy. National NGOs required legal status in order to operate openly and to enjoy possible tax privileges. International NGOs had to obtain government approval even to enter the country. Obviously, NGOs could not operate as if the state did not exist.

NGOs operate under a charter specifying their objectives and the scope of their activities, as well as their rights and obligations more generally. Their directors and officers are supposedly accountable to the state granting the charter. If they are operating internationally they are also accountable to the host state. They may be non-governmental, but in some degree they always depend on governments.

They are dependent on donors for all or part of their resources. Much of their financing comes from other NGOs, private or public corporations, government agencies and individuals who support their causes. In the case of many international NGOs, an increasing part of their resources in recent years has come from their home country governments directly or indirectly, although this varies greatly from one to another. Moreover, most require a tax exempt status in order to survive. NGOs cannot be oblivious to the desires and perceptions of their donors. Competition among NGOs for donations keeps them sensitive to donors' perceived priorities.

NGOs are also accountable to their own staff to some extent. Like other organizations, without good staff morale and loyalty they would be ineffective and would soon fade away. Some NGOs have been opportunistically created by their staff primarily to provide themselves with employment, leaving their humanitarian and social objectives with a lower priority.

Finally, NGOs ought to be accountable to the groups they are supposedly serving. Few NGOs, however, have formal mechanisms making them accountable to their clients if these are the rural poor. Occasional internal or external evaluations are common, but the evaluators seldom include representatives of intended beneficiaries. Instead, their accountability to clients, like those of business enterprises to customers, is informally enforced by competition among NGOs. In poor countries the number of potential clients far exceeds the supply of services offered by socially oriented NGOs. Nevertheless, competing NGOs have frequently divided rural communities and peasant organizations in their quest for the poor clients and attractive projects they require to justify their activities to donors. I have seen this in Bolivia, for example.

In view of these constraints, one can appreciate better the dedicated and highly professional contributions many NGOs have been able to make in support of social and humanitarian causes. They have often played crucial roles in movements aimed at approaching more socially and ecologically sustainable styles of development. But their capacity is limited. They can sometimes contribute to the emergence of social forces leading to popularly based institutional and policy reforms. They cannot be expected to be substitutes for a democratic political

system accountable to its participants. Only states have the potential to deal effectively with mass poverty in a world of plenty.

◆ International Organizations

International organizations and agencies associated with the United Nations system are in a uniquely advantageous position for promoting land reform in developing countries. They are well placed to call attention to the negative impacts of unjust agrarian structures on the livelihoods of the poor and on prospects for sustainable development. They can authoritatively put agrarian issues into broader historical and comparative perspectives. They possess considerable moral authority to legitimize placing land reform issues on international and national development agendas. They have the potential to mobilize considerable international resources and other support for states and popularly based organizations attempting serious land reform programmes.

Nonetheless, until now at least, the role of international organizations in promoting and supporting land reforms has been rather marginal and contradictory. At best their role has been similar to that of international NGOs, and for many of the same reasons. They are primarily intergovernmental bodies, although some (like the ILO) formally incorporate other social actors such as labour unions and employers in their governing bodies. They depend on developed country governments for most of their funds, although these may be supplemented by grants or loans from other sources, such as transnational corporations, benevolent foundations and individuals. They do not constitute a supranational government, but operate only at the convenience of their member states. The UN Security Council has sharply limited authority to sanction member states under certain circumstances, but this requires agreement of its seven permanent members, each with a right of veto. The ability of the Bretton Woods Institutions to impose unpopular economic policies on poor indebted countries depends not on democratic processes accountable to all member states (and, through them, to the poor), but rather on the financial clout they wield on behalf of the world's richest states and the transnational financial system.

Given these constraints, many observers are surprised that international organizations have been able to play any positive role at all in dealing with politically conflictive agrarian issues. That they occasionally were able to do so in several of the cases mentioned earlier illustrates some of their potential for helping to advance land reform processes. But the failure of most international agencies to take firm stands on agrarian issues in countries with patently unjust land tenure structures illustrates their weaknesses in this respect.

The United Nations Charter and the Declarations of Human Rights and of Economic and Social Rights helped legitimize discussion of land reform issues in international fora. The same was true for numerous other resolutions and declarations, some of them referring explicitly to land tenure issues, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and by other organizations such as the FAO and the ILO. These statements of principle or of intent provided internationally recognized rallying points for peasant organizations and others in many countries with repressive regimes beholden to large landowner supporters. They had no enforceable legal authority but they frequently boosted the moral and political credibility of those advocating reform. As mentioned earlier, the Punta del Este

declaration on land reform adopted by the OAS, for example, helped place agrarian issues high on the political agenda in several Latin American states during the 1960s.

Several international organizations have sponsored research that called attention to the need for land reform. As mentioned earlier, ECLAC studies in the 1950s that analysed agrarian problems in Latin America had considerable influence in later debates. The ILO and League of Nations had sponsored research on the importance of agrarian problems as early as the late 1920s, R.H. Tawney's **Land and Labour in China** (1932) being an outstanding example. ICAD studies of land tenure issues in Latin America mentioned above were sponsored by five international organizations and were influential in shaping later debates in the region. The FAO published several documents showing the need for agrarian reforms based on research it had carried out or sponsored. In the 1960s and 1970s it organized, with the ILO and the United Nations, international agrarian reform conferences that produced strong resolutions on land reform. Unfortunately, social research has more recently become a bad term in many international organizations, where it is contrasted disparagingly with action programmes designed to solve problems. Thus it is forgotten that good research can be an important prelude to constructive policies.

International organizations have provided useful technical assistance in many countries carrying out land reforms. The FAO sent a highly qualified Mexican expert to Bolivia in the 1950s to advise the government on land reform issues based on the Mexican experience. After the 1950s, the FAO, the ILO, UNESCO and several other international agencies offered technical assistance to member governments undertaking land reform programmes. This assistance tended to be particularly effective when aimed at helping government agencies establish research and training institutions with the active participation of peasant co-operatives and unions. These programmes provided technical assistance and logistical support, such as adapting modern communications technologies to the needs of semi-literate peasants and rural workers. This helped strengthen grassroots peasant organizations and to enable them better to communicate their problems, concerns and experiences among themselves and with the personnel of state agencies helping them.

The international organizations, like most NGOs, however, were invariably extremely sensitive to the political context in which they operated. When the government was no longer interested in pursuing agrarian reform objectives, they usually withdrew their support for peasant unions and co-operatives that had been pressing for land reform and had been among the beneficiaries of earlier programmes. International agencies tended to measure their success or failure principally by what governments of the day wanted. They often failed to insist that they also had an obligation to tailor their assistance to be congruent with international conventions and resolutions concerning human rights and sustainable development.

This was particularly the case with the international financial institutions. These adopted strong anti-poverty and environmental protection rhetoric, but they argued that their en-liberal policies would best promote economic growth and hence lead to sustainable development. This ignored the fact that the social and ecological problems they hoped to solve through more rapid economic growth had been

largely generated by the pattern of economic growth that had been taking place. This style of development was unlikely to become sustainable without popularly based institutional changes such as land reform. To the extent they have recognized this dilemma, they have tended to advocate "market friendly" land reforms. As was seen earlier, this fails to offer a solution and it could easily make the situation worse for many of the rural poor.

International organizations such as the FAO and IFAD have not responded more imaginatively to the current rural livelihood and ecological crisis in developing countries than have the Bretton Woods Institutions. This can be explained by the constraints mentioned earlier. Many of their member countries, and their own secretariats, have produced lucid analyses of agrarian problems. Nonetheless, their policies for dealing with them remain timid, ineffective and confined to minor variations on those being advocated by the "Washington Consensus". This situation is unlikely to improve unless, somehow, powerful social forces can be generated in both developed and developing countries leading to a strong and democratic United Nations that is accountable to all the world's peoples, including the poor.

CONTEMPORARY OPPORTUNITIES FOR LAND REFORM

Recent rapid socio-economic, political and technological changes on a global scale have deeply affected the roles of the state and other social actors. They have also generated enormous social tensions (UNRISD, 1995). How have they altered prospects for land reform in developing countries?

◆ Globalization and Obstacles to Land Reform

The increasing movements across national borders of financial capital, goods, services, information and some categories of people, as well as the emergence and wide diffusion of new technologies, is commonly called globalization. This supposedly results in greater wealth and growing interdependence among nations.[6]

Many rural people in developing countries have been among those most negatively affected by globalization processes. They still constitute nearly half the world's, and three fifths of the developing countries', population, ranging from over four fifths in the "least developed countries" to less than one third in Latin America. Moreover, they account for the vast majority of the world's poor and undernourished.

[6] These terms are misleading, however, as they carry the impression of a politically neutral processes. In reality, globalization has been characterized by increasing inequalities of all kinds, both within and among nations (UNDP, 1997; UNCTAD, 1997). Imperialism would be a more accurate characterization of what has been taking place, because the term evokes the notion of unequal power relationships. The locus of imperial power now resides with a few nation states holding a near monopoly of weapons of mass destruction together with huge transnational corporate entities mostly based in rich countries that have near monopolies over advanced technologies, global finance, access to many natural resources, and the mass media and communications (Amin, 1997).

The processes of commercialization, modernization and land alienation generating this rural poverty in a context of polarized agrarian institutions (such as land tenure) were discussed in the Introduction. These incorporation processes have accelerated during the latest phase of globalization in the late twentieth century. They have also undergone several qualitative changes associated with new technologies of production, transport, communications and political control. Structural adjustment programmes promoted or imposed by donor states and international financial institutions have accelerated marginalization of large rural groups in many developing countries. Liberalization of international trade and capital movements may bring benefits for some but often at the expense of a great many others.

The possibilities of a mobilized and organized peasantry seizing and maintaining control of land in large holdings, as occurred in many localities of Bolivia, Mexico and China during revolutionary upheavals, are now extremely remote in most countries. Economic and political power is increasingly centralized within urban-based national and transnational agencies and corporations. The frequent exhortations by those wielding centralized power for greater decentralization of state and corporate governance seldom include a prior democratization of land tenure and other social relations in rural localities. This leaves them without content for the rural poor. Such decentralization, when it actually occurs, usually implies tighter control by local powerholders, with diminished opportunities for the poor to appeal for support from potential allies at national and transnational levels.

Ironically, the neo-liberal ideologies now in vogue interpret privatization of property rights to mean granting secure access to land to those able to pay for it at market prices. Such privatization often benefits urban speculators and transnational corporations, but the rights to land by rural workers and poor peasants seem to be a very secondary concern. “Privatizing” peasant co-operatives in Honduras through their sale to the giant Chiquita Brands (the successor of United Fruit) does not seem to be what Adam Smith had in mind when he advocated competitive private enterprise.

These recent developments discouraging land reform have led many observers to say that it is no longer an important issue. The rural poor, they conclude, will simply have to wait until alternative employment is available elsewhere. Meanwhile, some of them might be helped by “safety nets” providing a minimal subsistence in place of starving. But the situation is far from being as hopeless as this view implies.

First, prospects for land reform in the past were extremely bleak until reform actually took place. Reform always required exceptional political circumstances — revolutions, pre-emptive populist policies by authoritarian regimes or more democratic processes. It is doubtful that land reform is politically more difficult now than in the past. Imaginative initiatives will be required, however, to bring it about and to make it effective in improving rural people’s livelihoods in a sustainable manner.

The social differentiation accompanying globalization not only affects in contradictory ways the mobilizing capacities of pro-reform peasant and worker

movements, but also those of large landholders and their allies opposing land reform. The possibilities have improved for peasants and rural workers to find influential supporters among the urban popular and middle classes, as well as from a few progressive large landowners. Moreover, the spread of formally democratic multi-party political regimes offers new opportunities to press for reform through the ballot box. Environmental movements, especially in developed countries but increasingly also in developing ones, can be powerful allies of the rural poor. So, too, can social movements aimed at advancing gender equality and human rights. Growing urban unemployment stimulates political pressures to improve social conditions in the countryside in order to slow migration of the rural poor to the cities and internationally.

The concentration of economic and political power in national capitals and developed country centres leaves governments more exposed to pressures for reform from national and international progressive social movements. These movements may focus on health, education, children, workers' rights, humanitarian relief, basic social, economic and other human rights, gender, environmental protection and a number of other issues. All have good reasons to support the demands of peasants and rural workers for more equitable distribution of rights to land, because this could help them advance their own special causes.

Modern communication technologies are now mostly controlled and used by the wealthy to advance their own interests. But they offer new opportunities for the poor to organize, share information and mobilize allies at home and abroad. To do this they will somehow have to acquire better access to these technologies, in the role of active protagonists and not merely as potential consumers of goods, services and of dominant ideologies. At present, the Internet offers a good example of some of these possibilities, as illustrated by its use by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico. How much longer access to the Internet can resist corporate and state control remains a moot question. While there is still space, progressive organizations such as NGOs, labour unions and popularly based movements, as well as international organizations — assuming they truly are dedicated to the ideals of the United Nations Charter — can use these new technologies effectively to support grassroots movements campaigning for land reform in developing countries.

◆ The Need for Flexible Approaches to Land Reform

As pointed out in the Introduction, a land tenure system is a sub-set of social relations. It specifies the rights and duties of diverse stakeholders in their access to land and to its potential benefits. The dichotomy between public and private property is dangerously misleading. Formal land tenure rules that fail to recognize this complexity of land tenure are unrealistic and ahistorical.

Nineteenth century apologists of Western capitalism advanced the notion that land was merely another commercial commodity like coal or textiles. They rationalized the myth of unlimited rights of landowners to use and abuse their properties and to evict at will tenants, workers and other users. The rights of customary users were legally extinguished, although in practice this was seldom fully achieved without violent conflict and multiple exceptions. The Communist manifesto reinforced wide acceptance of the dichotomy between public and private property, as its qualifications of "bourgeois property" and "presently existing private property"

were usually forgotten. In rich industrialized countries, private property rights to land are increasingly restricted through zoning regulations, rights of eminent domain, land use and environmental protection rules, subsidies, differential taxes, protection of tenants' and workers' rights, and multiple other mechanisms. The fiction that a corporate entity, no matter how large, controlling land is legally the same as a person, no matter how poor and powerless, however, weakens many initiatives to enforce social obligations associated with land ownership and use.

Land reform is primarily an issue of basic human rights. It implies access to land and its benefits on more equitable and secure terms for all of those who physically work it and primarily depend upon it for their livelihoods. In unjust agrarian structures, this implies redistributing land rights to benefit the landless and near landless at the expense of large landholders and others who appropriated most of its benefits before reform.

Once these concepts of land tenure and land reform are understood, it becomes easier to devise ways to bring about land reform. What land reform implies in practice always depends on the context and particular circumstances, but the basic principles remain the same. In developing countries, land reform usually involves expropriating large holdings and redistributing them as individual family holdings or as worker-managed co-operatives, but there are many variations and sequences depending on the situation. Where customary common property regimes are still vigorous, reform might mean secure tenure and restitution of lost lands. In some cases, land reform goals could be approached without redistributing land, but this is highly unlikely in poor countries. What is fundamental is that the beneficiaries participate actively and democratically in the process and that all of those needing access to land for their livelihoods are included. At the same time, the basic rights of communities, unborn generations and other legitimate stakeholders have to be protected.

Progressive NGOs and committed international organizations can play important roles as catalysts in helping grassroots peasant and landless movements organize and press their demands for land. They can help through research focused on the livelihood and sustainable development problems of the rural poor. They can provide valuable technical assistance, material resources and legal aid. They can facilitate the use of modern communication technologies by peasants and others struggling for reform. They can publicize violations of socio-economic and human rights, corruption and other abuses suffered by the poor. They can advance land reforms through advocacy at all levels.

But their roles will always be auxiliary to what must be fundamentally a domestic political process. The main actors in bringing about and consolidating genuine land reform must always include the landless and near landless, together with their political allies and the state. Well-intentioned NGOs and international organizations can help. They can also hinder if they fail to take into account the complex social dynamics that land reform implies.

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