

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 *Brief Overview on International Experiences*

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.

## **1.2 *Brief Overview on African Experiences***

There is growing research and policy interest in Africa's land question for varied reasons. Most notable is the recent escalation of the land conflict in Zimbabwe and growing calls for radical land reforms and reparations on the continent. The land question has become internationalised, not least because it suggests the incomplete decolonisation processes in ex-settler colonies, but also because the international management of the Zimbabwe land problem has highlighted various longstanding north-south grievances. The land question and persistent rural poverty in Africa highlight the neglect of social justice and equity issues which underlie the unequal control and use of land and natural resources proscribe neoliberal development policy agendas and which represent external dominance of African governance reforms.

The growth of resource conflicts in Africa increasingly reflect contradictions steeped in both colonial and post-colonial land policies and the significance that land concentration takes in contemporary struggles over 'development' and accumulation under global capitalism, as well as struggles for democratization. These contradictions question the capacity of neo-liberal market and political regimes to deliver land and economic reforms which can address both inequity and poverty. The widespread demand for radical reforms in other continents- notably Latin America and Asia- underlines the significance of the wider global level persistence of unequal class and race relations over land and resource control.

Africa's land and agrarian question have specific historical tendencies in comparison to its global incidence and a contemporary expression which has not been adequately elucidated by the plethora of 'new wave' land studies in Africa. Some scholars query the assumption that Africa has a classical land question or even a classic agrarian question, except for the former settler colonies given the absence of an history of extensive land expropriation, and the attendant restricted proletarianisation processes which occurred at the start of the last century.

Increasing urbanization, (38% in Africa) reinforces this doubt about whether sub-Saharan Africa has a land question. However inadequate access to land by

multitudes directly dependent on land and natural resources for their reproduction, persists alongside the gradual semi-proletarianisation of peasant labour, has expanded Africa's marginalised peasantries.

To assume that a land question in Africa can only arise out of a particular generic social formation, such as feudal and semi feudal tributary systems of land inequities or widespread settler colonial land expropriation, is to miss the salience of growing land concentration and inequality, and struggles to regain control over land. Indeed, internal migrations and involuntary settlements, changes in land use and land tenure systems in Africa over the last century, have produced dramatic inequalities in land control and conflicts, albeit in more localized scales than elsewhere. Africa's land question is defined by growing struggles for access to land and its secure use, as well as struggles to reclaim alienated land rights.

The land problem in Africa has escalated in the wider context of struggles over the land rights "embedded" in extensive mineral and other natural resources of exchange value to global tourism, forestry and bio-technology markets which are rapidly being concessioned into external control. Civil wars, inter-country conflicts in the region, migration and involuntary displacements are all symptomatic of increasing land conflicts involving direct confrontation over access to key natural resources by both domestic and external forces.

The dominance of external financial and development aid institutions in Africa's policy making processes and local markets fuels such land conflicts. Pressures for the growing marketisation of land reflect both external interests in land and resource control and the increasing internal demands for primitive accumulation through land by a broadening African indigenous capitalist class. New land policies increasingly justify these tendencies of unequal land control. Yet, these processes generate growing conflicts over land allocation and use, across many social and material cleavages, of class, gender, nationality, and ethnicity, including xenophobia over minority groups' rights. Variegated struggles at varying scales and localities over escalating unequal access to and control of land represent Africa's real land question.

Africa's land question cannot be understated, from the perspective of its ailing agriculture because of the lack of an agrarian transition based upon technological modernisation and the agro-industrial articulation. In terms of the agrarian basis of the land question, it is notable that the extent of developed arable and irrigable land available for agriculture on the continent is limited, despite the continent's large size. Pressures on land arising from demographic growth alone, have led to dramatic land scarcities, despite the incidence of land use intensification in a number of countries and specific regions. The extensive degradation of fragile land resources and increasing elite control of extensive prime lands under conditions of land scarcity all combine to broaden the uneven distribution of land and the resultant contradictions arising from constrained social and technical relations of production.

Given the importance of the rural land sector in attaining food security and reducing poverty, there is recognition that a vibrant agriculture and rural resources sector underpinned by balanced access to land resources is critical to an agrarian transition and to improving living standards. Pro-poor rural developmental programmes have been notably negligent of the fact that the lack of access to land and, inadequate strategies to mobilize financial and human resources to effectively develop the land economy are a fundamental constraint. The relative decline of agricultural production for domestic food and industrial requirements, vis-à-vis population growth and urban relocation is central to Africa's development dilemma. The concentration of income and consumption among the relatively wealthier and better endowed regions, especially among social groups with access to land and incomes in and outside agriculture limits the growth of the African domestic market and finances required to invest in the optimal utilisation of land based resources, given the unequal trade relation. Agro-industrial growth in Africa is thus limited, given the absence of a viable industrialisation project focused on national and continent-wide balanced development.

However unequal control over land is also visible in over natural resources that are embedded in land, emphasizing the importance of interrogating the land question not only as an agrarian based question but also as a multi-faceted problem reflected in the unequal control of industries such as tourism, mining, and forestry by internal

and external capitalist interests. Africa's rich and diverse mineral and biological resources, are of global significance but of more importance for its internal consumption and economic development.

There is also growing pressure on land resources for urbanization in Africa as shown by the proliferation of slums and their incumbent infrastructural inadequacies. Coastal settlements experiencing rapid population growth and infrastructural development also exhibit intensified struggles for land. Because rapid rural to urban migration continues to occur and non-agricultural employment prospects are slow to develop in Africa, growing number of households will however continue to depend for their social reproduction on adequate access to land.

These changing social and political forces of demand for land in Africa require renewed research efforts to uncover the changing land questions and conflicts, including and violent struggles for land, emerging class and gender relations, as well as the political contestations over land.

This paper argues that land and agrarian question in Africa exhibits three primary dimensions: land distribution, land tenure and land utilisation issues. First the distribution problem is the tendency towards growing inequalities in access to and control of land in relation to the increasing concentration of land among elites in varying degrees across the continent and, in relation to demographic pressures, the scarcity of fertile land and the continued stagnation of agricultural technological advances which would allow for the intensive capitalisation of less land. Second, land tenure problem reflects the growing insecurities over land control by the poor in relation to competing claims over land as well as a 'clash' of land tenure regimes arising from colonial and post-colonial interventionism in the shaping of land property rights. This is driven by growing demands for land marketisation by agrarian elites, external capital and various local interests – including migrants, those seeking credit through land, and a variety of local patronage structures. Third, is the persistent evidence of landuse inefficiencies and conflicts which arise from the competing land utilisation objectives dictated by state policies which direct land use patterns through incentives, competition among different agronomic production and socio-political systems (e.g. pastoralists – crop farming; wildlife – beef – cropping; export –

domestic markets etc) and the imposition of a myriad of land use regulations for the purported goal of promoting rather dubious environmental, agronomic and physical planning objectives.

The nature and effects of these three dimensions of the land question are varied in Africa although they are under-girded by political and economic experiences arising from common historically specific patterns of the power structures and governance systems, class and gender relations, and production relations, linked to domestic and international market relations that emerged over the last century. One outcome of this growing land question is the persistence of poverty and an agricultural crisis, and various resource conflicts which have destabilised the rural economy and politics in general. An important result, if not the cause of these emerging land questions and their emergent contradictory land policies is the inadequacy, corruption and hostility of the institutions that govern land management and those that are administration and adjudication systems are themselves a reflection of the emerging conflicted class and social relations which are determined by increasingly unequal power, structures and relations of production.

However the three dimensions of the land question can only be effectively understood in relation to the processes and systems of land governance namely: land administrative and land conflict resolution structures, as well as the social and political organisations or social movements that defend or challenge the unequal relations of three dimensions.

We argue that various social and political processes shape these land and agrarian questions. These include: the nature of state-civil society relations surrounding land, the nature of social movements addressing the land question in particular and civil society in general, the nature of existing rural social formations (semi-feudalism settlerism etc) which underlie the African neo-colony, and the degree of rural marketisation and economic incorporation into the global market system. These land questions, reflect more global dimensions of the land and agrarian question and neoliberalism in general, as we discuss next.

### **1.3 *Brief Overview on South African Experience***

South Africa's land questions is a critical factor in defining contemporary social transformation and in shaping the continent's development trajectory. Land scarcity and access constraints are argued to be the main source of persistent food insecurity, rural poverty, distorted accumulation and development, as well as of the escalating conflicts over land rights. Citizenship, as proscribed by contested land rights that mark 'belonging', is increasingly being reconfigured. Increased struggles for land reflect the absence of a development capable of absorbing the employment and consumption needs of growing populations into industrialising and diversified economies. The agrarian transition has so far failed to materialise, while the home market remains disarticulated. The unresolved land question in South Africa also highlights the failure to address historical social justice and contemporary inequality issues, especially through neo-liberal reforms. Land property relations are increasingly distorted by growing land concentration and exclusion, the expansion of private landed property and the deepening of extroverted (export) capitalist relations of agrarian production, alongside increased food insecurity and food imports (aid dependence), the continued decline of the value of growing agrarian exports and the collapse of Africa's nascent agro-industrial base.

Studies on land in Africa have tended to focus on customary land tenure and 'livelihood' issues rather than on the larger land questions underlying agrarian, mining and industrial development. Although some scholars have questioned whether Africa has a significant land question except in former settler colonies, given the absence of widespread colonial land expropriation, the unresolved agrarian question throughout the continent is widely recognised. This suggests the need to understand the place of land in longer-term processes of capital accumulation and proletarianisation as well as the effects of land administration systems on development and democratisation.

### **1.4 *Brief Overview on the Role of Youth***

Three key propositions are advanced in the paper, and these are (a) the land reform process, as an important vehicle for economic transformation in South Africa, should be flexible enough to recognise and accommodate the needs and constraints of different categories of intended beneficiaries, including the (needs and constraints of) youths – who seem to have been largely left behind in the land reform process to date, (b) the land reform process in South Africa should include clear provisions for agricultural information and knowledge as well as farming techniques and input support targeted at young people which will provide youths with the necessary tools needed to fully empower them as agricultural entrepreneurs and enable them to see farming in a positive light, and (c) the land redistribution exercise in South Africa should be accelerated if land and agriculture are to be used to improve and transform the employment position and livelihoods of youths in the country. Following this introduction and background, the paper concludes by making three recommendations. One for enhanced youth land rights in post-apartheid South Africa. Followed by a discussion of ideas on pathways to enhancing youth land rights towards an inclusive and progressive land reform process in the country.

## **2 Background**

In the context of a transition from feudal or pre-capitalist mode of production, the contradiction had been the availability of the propertyless class to sell its labour power to capital. This contradiction had been resolved through dispossession of the peasantry and other simple commodity producers. Once capitalism was installed, the debate had been: (a) whether the peasants will wither away or will be maintained, but articulated to the dominant capitalist mode of production. And (b) How does the capitalist mode get installed in pre-capitalist social formation – that is whether from below or from above?

In colonial contexts, the key agrarian question had been: how to get labour power to extract raw materials and generate surplus from the peasants in order to fund the colonial state. Like in many colonial societies, the agrarian question was resolved in

the interest of mining and agricultural capitals. Land dispossession was used to establish a coercive labour system that would ensure that there was a constant and sufficient supply of cheap labour to both capitalist agriculture and mining. Furthermore, the mass removals resulting from the implementation of the 1913 Land Act were a source of great suffering and hardship for the Africans – starvation in grossly impoverished communities in the overcrowded and underdeveloped reserves became the order of the day. They were forced to take up wage labour on farms or mines.

Once capitalism was installed in South Africa, African peasants production was nicely articulated to the dominant capitalist accumulation firstly through unequal exchange with colonial merchant capital and later through provision and reproduction of cheap labour power for mining and agricultural capitals. Put differently, African peasant production had two functional roles, namely: (a) reproduction of cheap labour, (b) Served as a market for white agricultural capital. The traditional leadership played a major in controlling the African rural inhabitants. Of course, the African inhabitants have never been homogenous in class terms. But the majority of the African rural inhabitants have been Africans, and in many instances living side by side with white commercial farmers.

When the African subsistence farming, oftenly undertaken by women, in the reserves were beginning to less productive, instead of providing more land, the Apartheid state, amongst other things and further denied the rural more land. Consequently rural poverty was deepened. In post-colonial situations, the post-colonial 'elites' and global capital basically exploited the peasants through different mechanisms including unequal exchange. In short colonial and postcolonial societies did not transform or resolve the agrarian question in a manner that resolved the colonial industrial structure. These economies still depended on the metropolis for durable consumer goods and productive consumer goods.

### **3 The Dynamics of Land and Agrarian in Latin America**

#### **3.1 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 owner's 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.

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 científicos) 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. 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.

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. 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.

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.

### **3.2 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, an abandoned large estate near Cochabamba with a Quechua-speaking Peruvian anthropologist was visited. 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.

### **3.3 Guatemala**

Social reforms extending minimal legal and political rights to the country's indigenous rural majority began with the Arevalo 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% 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 air force 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.

### **3.4 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.

### **3.5 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 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 farms 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% 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.

### 3.6 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. 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 was visited.

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.

### **3.7 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.

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.

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.

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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, one rapporteur was part of 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.

### **3.8 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 comuneros 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.

### **3.9 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.

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.

#### **4 Land Tenure Dynamics in Developing Countries of Africa**

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).

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.

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.

## **5 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. 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. 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.

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 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.

## 6 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). 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. FAOs 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.<sup>3</sup>

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 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 many 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.

## **8 Land Reform, the Agrarian Question and National Development**

Land reform is a necessary but not sufficient condition for national development. The link between land reform and national development was widely acknowledged in an earlier period of development (1950s–1970s), although implementation was generally limited and contingent on ‘Cold War’ geopolitics. From the 1980s onwards,

under the influence of international finance and neo-liberal economics, state-led interventionist land reform was removed from the development agenda and replaced by a concerted market-based land policy. This policy framework pursued the privatisation and commercialisation of land and focused on land transfers according to market principles.

The neo-liberal policy framework has had two implications for national development. It abandoned the project of integration of agriculture and industry on a national basis, promoting instead their integration into global markets, and it also aggravated economic and social insecurities, intensified migration to urban areas and created a deepening pattern of mal-development. With the end of the Cold War, the end of white rule in southern Africa, the deepening of the development crisis in Africa and the emergence of various land crises (e.g., in Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire) and the re-emergence of rural-based land reform movements since the 1990s, land reform has returned to the political and poverty agenda, but less to the development agenda. The practice of land reform continues to be based on market principles, while the theory of land reform has not yet articulated a coherent purpose for land reform in relation to national development. These trends reflect ideological and political differences that are manifested in various forms of organised and sporadic conflicts over land.

Land reform is a fundamental dimension of the agrarian question, and the agrarian question is a fundamental dimension of the national question. The classic agrarian question, concerned with the transition from feudal/agrarian society to capitalist/industrial society, has been only partly resolved by the course of development in the postwar period. While capitalist relations of production have displaced feudal-type relations virtually everywhere, few if any parts of the continent have experienced industrialisation. Indeed the international division of labour in industrial and agricultural production has persisted with only minor changes since the 1960s. The integration of Northern economies amongst themselves and with a small number of new industrial satellites has deepened, and a new division of labour within global industry and agriculture, based on technological capabilities, financial privileges and mercantilist trade policies, has emerged. These trends have increased

popular dependence on land for social reproduction, while agrarian productivity potentials remain unrealised.

With the failure to resolve the agrarian question, the national question remains unresolved, as national self-determination, born of the struggles against imperialism in the twentieth century, has failed to deliver development. Indeed there has been a retreat from the terms of the national question itself; under the auspices of international capital, and by means of the liberalisation of economies and an ideology of 'globalisation', the end of national sovereignty and the system of nation states has been widely proclaimed. However, as the post-war period of global accumulation reaches its limits, characterised by overproduction in world industry and agriculture as well as by the financialisation of capital, the national question re-emerges with particular urgency.

During the last quarter century many economic and political facts have changed both within African countries and between them. National capital has increasingly been absorbed by international capital except in rare cases (e.g., South Africa), agricultural mechanisation has grown and national economies have become much more dependent on international markets. Externally the international monetary system is less committed to stable exchange rates and fair adjustment mechanisms between commercial surplus and deficit states. The key international currency remains under the jurisdiction of a single state (USA). Capital controls have been removed (under structural adjustments), and international financial markets now fully control national macroeconomic policies. The new system of trade rules and procedures (under the World Trade Organization) has deepened liberalisation and subordinated more African states to mercantilist trading partners from the West, although the emerging trend of Chinese capital in search of African oil and minerals slightly tilts this picture. While regionalism has been renewed through the African Union, and is a potentially progressive process, in practice, regional integration has been undermined by following the priorities of global integration rather than those of the African home market. These conditions suggest the need for an alternative national development strategy based on a credible agrarian reform agenda.

Agrarian reform, including land reform, was always intended to serve national industrialisation. However, recent African land debates have underplayed the national development potential of agrarian reform by counterpoising three general views on the purpose of agrarian reform: the 'social', the 'economic' and the 'political'. The social version of land reform is currently predominant in many of Africa's poverty reduction debates. This implicitly argues that the existing African agro-industrial base (that which survived structural adjustment and liberalisation) is sufficient and competitive enough and that agricultural export capacity is rewarding but limited by weak foreign investment incentives and to a lesser degree by Northern market distortions. As such any intervention in the agrarian sector should be confined to providing some land tenure security, especially to dispossessed and unemployed workers, until more 'livelihoods' or non-farm employment can be generated elsewhere in the informal economy. From this point of view it is also argued that the problem of employment can no longer be dealt with by means of agrarian reform, as had been the formula in the 1950s and 1960s, for this would destroy existing agro-industry. Some argue that smaller-scale production is inherently unproductive and needs to be complemented by growing capital-intensive, large-scale farming (Sender and Johnston 2004) and that the growing urbanisation trends of the last two decades are irreversible, while reflecting de-agrarianization and a new urban modernity requiring 'de Soto-type' land tenure formalisation to assign value to ghettoic assets. Thus, land reform debates that focus on poverty reduction tend to be informed by a social welfarist perspective on development, reflected in various land tenure programmes in Benin, Malawi, Tanzania and so forth.

The economic version of the perspective on land reform promotes the idea that smaller-scale agriculture could reach a reasonable level of productivity and that land reform is a useful basis for development, since urbanisation is partly reversible. This view emphasises the 'family farm' and essentially calls for the promotion of middle capitalist farms utilisutilising wage labour. These would have the potential to absorb labour, depending on the appropriateness of the technologies developed, since these could undermine employment in the longer term. Yet for the middle-sized farm

to realise its potential of redirecting production to the national market and hence to synergise dynamically with domestic wages, a reversal of neo-liberal policies would be required. States would instead have to adopt a concerted national development policy framework seeking the integration of the home market. This framework of petty agrarian commodity production promotion has been advanced in numerous African countries with the social differentiation process generating less than 10% of the middle farm among the peasantry.

A related current in this debate sees economic potential in a bifurcated agricultural sector in which large-scale farming specialises in the export of high-value crops while smaller-scale farming specialises in domestic provision. However, the current contradictions between small-scale and largescale farming in the economic and political process are not expected to attenuate but accentuate, and the bifurcated model would demand a generalised shift in the national policy framework that would challenge the historical privileges (in terms of credit, services, electricity, irrigation and marketing infrastructure) enjoyed by the large-scale farming sector. This bimodal agrarian policy framework has been vigorously pursued recently in Botswana, the Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria and Uganda, especially with the aid of relocating white Zimbabwean farmers. Opponents argue that the benefits of largescale farming are overestimated, given its historical privileges, social costs and environmental sustainability. This argument sees value in a national strategy of partial 'delinking' from the global market but faces the chronic foreign-exchange dilemma as well as national and international opposition.

The political version of land reform also has two main tendencies that are not necessarily distinct from economic thinking: the 'micro' and 'macro' tendencies. The micro tendency sees political value in land reform as a means to dissolve non-capitalist relations of production or excessively concentrated power structures where they continue to exist at local and regional levels. Land reform in this view should be confined to a targeted local and regional democratisation project and not to a national project of structural transformation. By contrast the macro tendency views land reform as a means of dissolving the political power of large agrarian capital

operating in tandem with international capital and has an interest in the maintenance of an extroverted model of accumulation. This tendency sees large-scale land reform as a political precondition for the implementation of a national development policy for the integration of the home market. It considers private landed property an obstacle to the mobilisation of such a national project.

## **9 African Land Reforms, Primitive Accumulation and Development**

The economic and material foundation of the African state rests largely on primary resources extraction and export activities in agriculture, oil, mining and other natural resources (forestry, wildlife, biodiversity exploitation). With a few exceptions of countries that have experienced capital-intensive industrial growth, such as South Africa, the control of land and natural resources and their product markets is a dominant factor in the mainstream processes of capital accumulation and social reproduction. These determine the revenues and resource base of most African states, such that power structures and politics are heavily influenced by control of land even where mineral rents are critical.

Large tracts of lands in many African countries are controlled by the state through various property relations. State agencies hold land directly and indirectly, the state has powers over local authorities that control land under customary tenure and, through its regulatory instruments, the state wields powers over statutory lands, particularly leasehold lands and land markets. State power and political hegemony over national territory is expressed specifically through powers over the allocation of land and related resources, the regulation of land tenures and land use and through state structures responsible for the resolution of disputes that arise from competing claims over land. Such control is accompanied by extensive state influence over the allocation and use of water and natural resources, and, through this and other economic policies, the state directs financial resources and incentives that influence patterns of land utilisation. Thus African states broker and build power structures and accumulation largely through the control of land and natural resource allocations using various systems of distribution. Land reforms represent changes in the extant

land resource allocations, regulatory powers and institutions of the state, traditional authorities and emerging forms of capital.

The African state, situated within the context of neo-colonial class formation processes and extroverted economic structures, is itself shaped by differentiated internal social forces that define political power and accumulation, but these remain subordinated to external capital and markets. Yet the state is central to 'primitive accumulation' in general and access to major national socioeconomic resources in particular, given the absence of a mature indigenous bourgeoisie. Access to political office can be critical to the direction of accumulation. Weak neo colonial African states, whether these were formerly settler colonies or not, retain different degrees of 'customary' regimes of authority, including some forms akin to remnants of semi-feudal regimes, such as those found in Morocco, Ethiopia and northern Nigeria. These play a critical role, together with the central and local governments, in the control and allocation of land.

The primary contradiction facing neo-liberal development strategies and democratic struggles remains the unequally globalised markets. Trade relations are intended to replace state interventions as an instrument of development for the internal needs of society within an integrated economy, based on improving resource and technical productivity and returns to labour at levels adequate for basic social reproduction. State interventions for development, tied under increasingly market-based relations of resource (including land) control, have tended to exclude the weakly organised and favoured domestic elites and foreign capital through the manipulation of the markets and administrative processes that govern resources such as land and water. The control of land has increasingly become a key source of mobilising power through electoral politics in which capital and class power direct struggles for democratisation and development. Land reforms can be critical sites of political struggles, when class and race power structures are unevenly pitched in relation to the interests of external capital and in the context of unequal land distributions, as the Zimbabwe experience shows. The 1992 Kenya elections outcome, for example, was grounded in cynical strategies of politicians who manipulated long-standing but latent inter-ethnic disputes over land into violent confrontations. Thus, the nature and

form of state control and the ideological grounding of the ruling incumbents can be critical to the form and content of land reforms. The nature of Africa's current intellectual and policy debates on land reflects important ideological and political contestations around the definition of land and agrarian questions, hence the trajectory of land and agrarian reform that is required to undergird sustainable development and the role of the state vis-à-vis domestic markets (including agrarian markets) as well as international markets. The neo-liberal agenda emphasises market liberalisation within a global hegemonic project that subordinates the African nationstate accumulation project to global finance capital. The contradictions of this neo-liberal trajectory manifest themselves partly in Africa's land and agrarian questions, ineffective land reforms and the mobilisation of various social forces around land.

## **10 Unique Features of the African Land Question**

There are some uniquely African social features that define its land questions and approaches to land reform, including why the dominant emphasis on land tenure reform has evolved. At the advent of African colonialization, of widespread purely feudal political formations based on the specific social relations of production in which land and labour processes are founded on serfdom or its variants, essentially the extraction of surplus value from serfs by landlords through ground rents using primitive forms of land rental allotments, and through the mandatory provision of different forms of 'bonded' or 'unfree' labour services such as sharecropping. The other tributary exactions on the peasantry under feudalism were uncommon in Africa and not as intense where they obtained. Most rural African societies were structured around lineage-based communal structures of political authority and social organisation in which access to land was founded on recognised and universal usufruct rights allocated to families (both pastoral and sedentary) of given lineage groupings. Such land rights also included those eventually allocated to assimilated 'slaves', migrants and settlers.

This means that African households held land and mobilised their labour relations relatively autonomously of the ruling lineages and chiefs, mainly for their own

consumption needs and secondarily for social or communal projects on a minor scale. Under these conditions production for trade occurred on a small but increasing scale since colonialism. African social formations had some exploitative elements of tributary social relations of production. These can be adduced from the contributions that households made, from small parts of the household product and labour, to the rulers' social projects (e.g., the king's fields, granary reserves and so forth). The essential issue that distinguishes the African land question from elsewhere is the absence of rural social relations of production based on serfdom, such as land renting and bonded labour, in a context where monopoly over land by a few landlords did not exist. Colonialism extended the extroversion of production and the process of surplus value extraction through the control of markets and extra-economic forces, but left the land and labour relations generically free.

Under colonialism 'indirect rule' modified the organisation of peasant societies through contrived changes to the procedures of customary rule and of leadership and directed peasant production towards generalised petty commodity production, mainly through the control of finance, markets and infrastructures. While migrant labour processes were engineered almost everywhere, within limited geographic confines in settler Africa they accompanied extensive and institutionalised land expropriations that led to the proletarianisation of large segments of peasant labour, generating largescale landlessness and land shortages alongside semi-proletarianisation. Under indirect rule the customary systems of authority with regard to land tenure were thus retained but adapted to suit the needs of the state to excise some lands and allocate them to specific production schemes or classes, and these allowed lineage leaders larger land endowments.

While the dichotomy which defines non-settler and settler African land questions, based on large-scale historical land alienation remains, it has increasingly become less acute in some regions of given countries because of generalised but location specific narrow forms of land concentration. This concentration has emerged both from 'below' and 'above' – from below through internal social differentiation and from above through excision of lands to elites using state land administration structures

and emerging land markets. This emphasises the fact that the African neo-colonial state has been 'activist' in promoting agrarian capitalist change in a manner that has supported land concentration among capitalist farmers and enabled the dominant classes to marginalise peasants and workers. On a continental scale these processes nonetheless suggest that neither large-scale land alienation processes nor landlessness nor total proletarianisation nor have bonded forms of rural labour resulted. They point to a diffuse but significant structure of land concentration and marginalisation processes that are socially and politically significant.

### ***10.1 Resilient African Peasantries, Semi-Proletarianisation and Agrarian Reform***

The prevalence of semi-proletarianisation – worker peasants – alongside the retention of large peasantry, or of small cultivators, means that in general African rural societies retain households with independent landholdings, albeit at a diminishing scale and on increasingly marginalised lands. Critically their agricultural production and land use activities and relations of production are restricted by the quality and scale of land available and by state agrarian policies as well as markets which extract significant surplus value from them. African land and agrarian reforms therefore need to redress these land inequities and direct land use towards internally beneficial and articulated development for the transformation of Africa's peasantry.

The peasantry – small-scale/family agriculturalists operating within the generalised system of commodity production – does not constitute a class in itself, but inherent in it are the antagonistic tendencies of proletarian and proprietor. The ideal peasant household reproduces itself as both capital and labour simultaneously and in internal contradiction, but this combination of capital and labour is not spread evenly within the peasantry for two main reasons. First, the peasantry is differentiated between rich, middle and poor petty commodity producers, a spectrum that ranges from the capitalist that employs labour-power beyond the family to the semi-proletarian that sells it. As such, the middle peasantry is the only category that embodies the ideal type of petty-bourgeois production, neither managing to hire nor sell labour-power – and which in turn is rare. Second, the combination of capital and labour is not spread

evenly within single households either differentiated by gender or generation; patriarchs control the means of production, while women and children provide unwaged labour. This may appear on the surface as a 'different' mode of production, but it has been argued convincingly that petty-commodity production is firmly embedded in the capitalist system and in fact is a normal feature of capitalist society, even if a subordinate and unstable one.

Under capitalism the peasantry remains in a state of flux within the centre- periphery structure spawned by colonialism, as proletarianisation co-exists with peasantisation and semi-proletarianisation. The form and scale of the actually existing peasantry in Africa is both an empirical and an interpretive problem to be understood from the composition of household income by source, including non-exchangeable sources of sustenance and from an analysis of household residential patterns as between town and country. It has been argued that under structural adjustment peasants have become 'problematic', as they are 'multi-occupational, straddling urban and rural residences, and flooding labour markets'. Yet the African peasantry has evolved in this way for much of the twentieth century.

However structural adjustment has been accompanied by intensified migration. Africa now has the fastest rate of urbanisation in the world (3.5%) and nearly 40 percent of the population is now urbanised. Migration should not be taken to mean full proletarianisation or permanent urbanisation, but the spreading of risk in highly adverse circumstances. Had this urbanisation been accompanied by industrialisation and job formation, the conclusion could have well been otherwise. The reality is different – urbanisation alongside de-industrialisation and retrenchments. Urbanisation takes the predominant form of illegal and unplanned settlement. It is notable in this connection that migration is not merely one-way, as workers retrenched from mines and farms are also known to seek peasantisation, or as urbanites enter the land reform process. This situation is mirrored by trends in Latin America that are not substantially different even if the population there is nearly twice as urbanised and still urbanising.

Intensified migration has been a two-way process in Latin America as well, as opposed to secular urbanisation, which Kay terms the 'ruralisation of urban areas' and 'urbanisation of rural areas', whereby rural and urban workers compete both for jobs, including agricultural jobs, and for residential plots in both urban and rural areas. It has also been observed that retrenched workers from mines and industry have joined this struggle and have also sought to become peasants themselves, the most prominent case being in Bolivia, where former miners have taken up coca production. The semi-proletarianisation thesis is disputed by those who see urbanisation and proletarianisation as definitive and therefore dismiss agrarian reform as anachronistic, especially Kay's particular version of semi-proletarianisation, which underestimates the political significance of the countryside and even combines with the 'end of land reform' thesis to write off an alternative pattern of accumulation. The semi-proletarianisation thesis has yet to be overturned either in theory or in practice, especially given that agrarian change within the contemporary centre-periphery structure does not provide for massive population relocations to the north.

The rise of a richer class of peasants alongside a majority who became semi-proletarianised or landless means that full proletarianisation has been generally forestalled, not least by state action as well as by rural households that hold onto a plot of land and maintain the dual income strategy of petty commodity production and wage labour. Rural non-farm activities and markets have proliferated, such that between 30 and 40 percent of household incomes are now derived from off-farm sources. The transition to capitalism in the periphery has thus taken place under disarticulated accumulation and in subordination to the accumulation needs of the centre. In consequence the transition has not been characterised by an 'American path', as identified by Lenin – that is, a broad-based accumulation by petty-commodity producers 'from below' – but by varied paths.

Where the neo-liberal social agenda failed spectacularly in Zimbabwe, large-scale re-peasantisation has taken place outside the control of the World Bank, hence the

penalties imposed from the North, but a new pattern of accumulation from below has not yet emerged. Such trends are now 'normal' processes of agrarian change in the African periphery under neo-liberalism, where rural populations have been subjected to unfettered market forces, where they have struggled for re-peasantisation among other political and economic ends and have in effect struggled to reproduce functional dualism largely on their own, with variable success and different and contingent levels of support from state and non-state agencies.

Alongside this semi-proletarianisation process, various social hierarchies derived from gender, generation, race, caste and ethnicity have intensified under capitalism and functional dualism. In a contemporary world disarticulated accumulation and its corollary, semi-proletarianisation, provide the structural economic basis for the flourishing of powerful social hierarchies that either fuse with class (e.g., race, caste) or cut across it (gender) and reproduce apparently non-capitalist forms of 'landlordism', even despite the historical culmination of the 'junker path'. The synergy between class and race is notable in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia, where historical domination and the process of resistance have fused class and race discourses.

## **11 Land and Agrarian Questions in Settler Africa**

Another critical factor which defines the African land question in relation to its development path is the legacy of the settler colonial land and livestock expropriations that accompanied colonial conquest and the nature and extent of reparations that are demanded, based on 'living memory' and as an integral element of resolving the 'national' question. This nationalist land question of sovereign right and of redressing racial and ethnic imbalances in property and economic relations has tended to be underestimated in spite of the numerous indigenous land struggles evident today. Land reform programmes in this situation, where compensation of current large landholders is considered almost normative, face popular expectations that former colonial masters should pay the victims of current land reform expropriations, if not also the victims of colonial expropriation, who have suffered long-term loss. Demands for colonial land reparations have been made in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Namibia and on a smaller scale in Botswana and Swaziland, as has

been the case in other nations with a history of settler colonial land expropriations. In some countries where historic land reforms occurred, for example, in Japan and Taiwan, these were financially supported by former colonial or imperial powers, especially in the context of cold war political hegemonic efforts.

Reparations for colonial land losses in Africa have not been adequately addressed. African governments, the Zimbabwe government in particular, allege that racism and protection by international donors of their land-owning 'kith and kin' and of their capital in Africa is at the centre of the land reform dilemma and of the current political controversy. Current structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and poverty reduction strategies, which provide lending and development assistance on condition of neo-liberal economic and governance reforms, undermine national capacities to redress these land grievances according to the rule of law. This feature emphasises the colonial and external dimension of Africa's land question and reform processes, as well as the political controversy of market-driven land reform strategies in the context of neo-liberal 'globalisation'.

Consequently demands for agrarian reform in settler Africa have struck at the heart of the dominant national/cultural identities through which the conditions of super-exploitation are reproduced. In Africa, however, the issues of race and class have been strongly politicised for a longer period, and armed national liberation struggles against colonialism intensified these. The attainment of majority rule across the continent, within the neo-colonial framework, was characterised by the nurturing of small, indigenous, extroverted bourgeoisies with an interest in defending the disarticulated pattern of accumulation, while in southern Africa neo-colonialism coincided with structural adjustment. National politics have been galvanised by rural and urban class struggles through growing class differentiation among blacks. This has given impetus to a new period of inter-capitalist conflict between emergent black bourgeoisies and established capital, both extroverted and both bidding over the land question. The result has been a stark bifurcation of the national question. On the one hand indigenous capital has confronted settler and foreign capital, transforming the meaning of 'national liberation' in its own terms and hijacking land reform, while on the other hand the historical realities of class and race persist,

characterised by functional dualism within a white supremacist framework, including the racialized landlordism's to which it gives rise.

## **12 Three Dimensions of Africa's Land and Agrarian Question**

Three land questions therefore dominate the political economy of development in Africa today. These are the increasing concentration of land control and restricted access to marginalised rural and urban populations, the expansion of marketised land transactions and the persistence of land-use processes that distort agrarian transition. Land scarcity and denial of access to natural resources by large landholders and the state through laws that exclude the majority and that privatise public resources, all contribute to human distress, poverty, landlessness and homelessness. In some situations, it is the scarcity of arable land that is at stake (e.g., in North Africa), while in others (e.g., in West Africa) it is the system of land administration and conflicts between the state and local communities and various other social groups (men, migrants, women, urbanites, civil servants, youths and poor households) that are problematic. In former settler colonies, it is the challenge of land redistribution and related land struggles that are dominant.

### ***12.1 The Land Distribution Question: Equity and Socio-Political Relations***

Land distribution inequalities in Africa vary in their broad character depending on the degree of colonial history, foreign ownership and internal class and ethno-regional differential. Settler land expropriation varied in Africa. It was most extensive in Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia but also occurred to a lesser extent in Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia. The largest scale of white settler land expropriation occurred in South Africa, where 87 percent of the land was alienated. After independence white settler populations in all these countries tended to decrease, although the proportion of land held by white minorities has not decreased proportionately. Instead there has been a gradual increase in foreign landholdings in countries such as Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi in the context of renewed interest by international capital in natural resources based around tourism and mining. In Malawi during the last three years long-term Asian residents have increasingly been identified as 'foreign' landowners, largely on

racial and dual citizenship grounds, given that land policy reforms prohibit foreign land ownership. Absentee land ownership exacerbates feelings against foreign land ownership. In Namibia corporate ownership of lands hides the influx of foreign landowners, particularly those who are shifting land use from agriculture to tourism. Racially based differentiation of economic power and wealth associated with some degree of land control remains a source of land conflicts. Even in some non-settler African countries, small foreign immigrant populations such as the Asians in East Africa tend to be associated with large freehold and leasehold landholdings.

Land distribution problems in non-settler countries occurred initially through rural differentiation processes, which heightened from the 1970s and escalated in the 1990s. The maturation of an African petit bourgeoisie after independence saw new landholding concentrations among retired public servants, professionals, indigenous business people and other urban elites. These social forces emerged from earlier nationalist, political and administrative leaderships, traditional elites and new post-independence middle-class elements whose accumulation treadmill focused on agrarian exports. Such rural differentiation, alongside the growth of poor rural peasantry and semiproletarian populations that straddle the rural and urban divide, explains the demand for land reform policies in favour of elites. Evidence from Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia also reveals that rural land inequality has grown in line with structural adjustment programmes. Differential access to land and the growth of land concentration have emerged both from 'below' and from 'above'.

Colonial land injustices and current land policies have led to increased ownership patterns are derived from endowments arising from class differentiation strategies that emerged in the colonial era and have led to growing landlessness. For example, Kenya's land law grants enormous powers of control of land to the president, who holds land in trust for the state. Kenyan presidents, however, have tended to grant land to a few individuals and corporate interests. This process has affected the majority of the lands utilised by pastoralists, who occupy and use over 60% of the Kenya landmass. Thus, from above, land allocation and land reform policies have

promoted land accumulation by the direct official provision and private grabbing of large landholdings by the elite. From below processes of local agrarian and power differentiation have encouraged local elites to amass larger landholdings amidst growing land scarcity and landlessness. This has entailed widespread situations in which local agrarian capitalists have emerged and acquired larger-than-average tracts of land through internal social differentiation processes. These processes include resource accumulation from land grabbing, from various state resources and from the accumulation of petty agricultural savings, wages and remittances and other non-farm sources. Local land concentration also entails situations in which traditional leaders, elders and indigenous 'settlers' have hoarded larger land parcels of better quality. Land tenure reforms tend to formally recognise discriminatory customary tenure rules or to condone their persistent abuse by local elites and local state functionaries, as well to introduce statutory tenures for the benefit of these elites. While unequal landholding structures are not as extreme as in the white settler territories, processes of land concentration now occur on a significant scale.

Colonial and post-independence land policies also tended to partition national economies into ethno-regional enclaves of unequal growth, where land and resource concentration occurred alongside marginalisation. Land conflicts take the shape of 'ethnic' struggles among pastoralist groups competing for the control of grazing lands and water supplies, especially during droughts. Such land conflicts escalated following the demarcation of boundaries that fragmented pastoral groups and impeded cross-border movements and undermined the viability of customary land and resource-use systems. Minority groups have suffered substantially, and land distribution conflicts affecting some ethnic groups, especially minority 'indigenous' groups (such as the San/Bushmen in Botswana and the Herero in Namibia) are common in some countries, especially where post-independence land expropriations by the state have facilitated or led to the reallocation of land to local elites and foreign capital. In some countries the spatial re-ordering of villages and families was instrumentalised by the colonialists to consolidate ethnic-based power structures of their choice and to create a framework within which taxes could be collected, migration regulated and selected land allocation strategies pursued to suit their

interests. Thus many African social or ethnic conflicts are structured by the unequal control of land and natural resources, depending on the histories of land control, farming systems and political structures. Unequal land distribution also arises from the growing tendency for land concessions and sale to foreign companies through investment agreements in agriculture, tourism, forestry and urban land investments. Multinational companies have become a critical force in the unequal control of land, emphasising the importance of the international dimension of the land question.

### **12.2 *Land Rights, Private Property and Markets***

A major dimension of Africa's land and agrarian question has been the search by both colonial and post-independence states, as well as emergent landholding classes, including foreign capital, for the transformation of customary land tenures and property rights into private landed property and the establishment of land markets based on individual freehold and leasehold titles to rural and urban land. The experience with land tenure reforms is perhaps best documented in West and East Africa. Several countries in West Africa have pursued land registration as a step towards creating land markets. Land tenure policy and legislative reforms have escalated in West Africa since the early 1990s, with countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania introducing the concept of private property in response to such pressures.

When empirical evidence questioned the relevance of privatisation in promoting security of tenure and the lack of marked differences in investment between customary tenure systems and private property rights, the land tenure policy debate shifted towards 'local rights recognition'. The increased commercialisation and expropriation of land as a result of the production of export crops set in motion serious conflicts, increased land pressure and resulted in the growth of a land market in Ghana. These tenure reforms essentially veer towards establishing land markets over the long term.

In East Africa and the Horn, post-independence land tenure reforms have ranged from individualisation and privatisation, as in Burundi, Kenya and the Comoros to a collectivist approach in Tanzania and Ethiopia. Most countries in East Africa have provided some legal recognition to indigenous customary land tenure. Tanzania,

Ethiopia and Eritrea abolished private ownership and sought to replace indigenous tenure systems with alternative community-based tenure reforms. In North Africa tenure reforms took ascendance from the 1970s with an incomplete process of registration and certification of ownership in Tunisia and Morocco. The process of privatisation of state and collectively owned lands has also been slow, as has the emergence of land markets.

The widespread trend in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s towards individualisation and titling of customary lands was sponsored by donors who were convinced of the superiority of private property rights. When these schemes failed to gain social and political acceptance, the World Bank in the 1990s argued that, as population pressure increased, societies would spontaneously evolve new property relations and land markets and that the task of African governments should be to formalise such evolving property relations through titling. However, contrary to the claim of recognising local land rights, the establishment of land titles and registers has also facilitated a new wave of land alienation and investment by domestic and foreign entrepreneurs.

In general land conflicts arising from attempts to market land by assigning exclusive land rights to individuals have led to a conflictual relationship over the power of the state to allocate land vis-à-vis that of customary law authorities. Control over land allocation and concession procedures in post-independent African states tends to be increasingly delegated to elected or appointed rural councils, leading to conflicts between formal law and customary land rights, for example, in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso and in Ethiopia. Although the state has taken over the absolute right of land allocation, these local authorities usually remain legitimate in the eyes of the community and continue to enjoy considerable political power over land management systems.

In many African countries a dual legal system for land conflict management and adjudication has been the source of many conflicts and contradiction over land rights. Customary law in land matters in southern Africa, for example, applies mainly to indigenous Africans, while the formal legal system is reserved for white settler

land markets. African countries with ethnic groups that practice different customary legal systems may or may not recognise the dominant systems of customary adjudication. In those countries with significant Muslim populations (such as Nigeria, Tanzania and Sudan) the adoption of Islamic family laws in predominantly Muslim regions contradicts both the customary laws and received legislation on land that applies to other regions with different legal traditions. Many communities resent the heavier presence of administrators (besides the traditional leaders) in customary systems of tenure that is found in freehold tenure regimes, perceiving it as restricting (and in some cases criminalising) use of natural resources and imposing land use policies that the local people may not like. The fact that individuals under freehold tenure, including those on plantation estates, tend to have more rights to the management of their land creates the problem of the assumed superiority or inferiority of the different forms of tenure, when in fact these problems are based on the form of land administration.

Thus tenure inequities are reinforced by the fact that the expropriation of land for 'commercial' and 'social' development is usually carried out by central state institutions that, in the name of development and national interest allocate land to state projects and private commercial interests to the exclusion of the poor. When rural people oppose this expropriation, the legal channels available to readdress their concerns are limited, since the state has created the legal framework that has already initiated the process of expropriation. This is usually carried out by unrepresentative land bodies, including chiefs, elders, and others in leadership positions at ward level. While chiefs are often the partners of the state in expropriating farm land, they are recognised by the state as the legitimate representatives of the people, so that their role in the mediation of land conflicts is usually overshadowed by transmitting government orders to the rural people and ensuring compliance with government policies.

### ***12.3 Extroverted Agrarian Development and Distorted Home Markets***

A long-standing land question in Africa is the manner in which development policies, including economic incentives and public allocations, have directed the use of land in

ways that are not beneficial for national development and that favour distorted accumulation by a small elite and foreign capital. The productive purposes of land use, including the types of commodities produced and their trade and domestic benefits, and the levels of productivity promoted by these policies, have tended to remain extroverted. Land use policies currently undervalue land, largely by allocating land and related resources to commodities with poor returns and domestic linkages. This external co-optation by neo-liberal policies has led to the demise of African agriculture, expanded food insecurity, dependence on food imports and food aid and the inability of agriculture to accumulate investible resources and finance itself without resorting to external debt. The trend towards expanding land use patterns for exports has led not only to the loss of local livelihoods (pastoralism and peasant cropping systems) but also to increased conflicts over the control of land and gradual processes of land alienation. One controversial trend emanating from the liberalisation of land use policies is the conversion of farming land to exclusively wildlife and tourism-based land uses through the consolidation of large-scale farms into even larger scale 'conservancies'. These land uses are justified as being the most environmentally, socially and economically sustainable management of land and natural resources in fragile areas. But these conservancies add to the previous exclusion of peasantries from substantial lands by the state in the name of attracting national, regional and international capital in the tourism, forestry and biotechnology sectors. They remove the visibility of the human face of individual land ownership from the struggles over land and shift these to abstract legal entities of ubiquitous domicile, justified through putatively benign environmental theologies. Thus, the socioeconomic face of rural differentiation through large-scale land ownership and use for external markets is transformed into remote public and private shareholding structures that extol modern common property management regimes and decry traditional communal tenures.

Tourism, environmentalism and related markets have thus created a new land frontier in African states in which various 'stakeholders' at the local, district, provincial, national and international levels, involving private, state, NGO and community actors, are engaged in struggles for the exploration and preservation of new forms of biodiversity and the methods of their economic and social exploitation.

This preferential allocation of state resources to land uses aimed at the reproduction of nature in state lands and in parks and forests emphasises their short-term commercial and macroeconomic value to the state, elites and foreign capital, rather than any interest in rural poverty reduction. Land use policies and regulations tend to be based on the view that large farms are critical for agricultural export growth and that small producers should focus on production for their own consumption and domestic markets. In most of Africa, except perhaps in western and north-eastern areas, relatively larger landholdings under freehold or leasehold tenure are supported by the state because of their perceived superiority for the production of agricultural produce for export. Yet smallholders on customary land grow almost all the coffee exports in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The same is true for tea, beans and various horticulture products in Kenya. In addition there are many smallholder cocoa farmers in West Africa and smallholder cotton farmers in western, eastern and southern Africa. At the same time evidence suggests that smallholder production of food for own consumption has become critical for the food security and sustainable livelihoods of the majority of Africa's people.

Much scholarship on Africa tends to consider national internal agrarian policy deficiencies to be the main cause of Africa's agricultural and rural problems. Yet the most striking feature of African agricultural performance over the last three decades is the growing rural income distribution inequalities and broader social differentiation consequent upon the expansion of rural markets and of negative global economic integration. In historical perspective these interpretations of the causes of the agrarian crisis reflect poorly on the African nationalist agenda, because it has delivered neither industrial development nor stability and has generated greater social conflict over land and other natural resources. Shifts in African land use patterns have always been a highly contested dimension of its agrarian question. Land use policies increasingly uphold a moral and socioeconomic value in which allocating prime land to extroverted (export) cropping, livestock and wildlife and tourism uses is considered of greater utility than land use for national economic integration to satisfy the home market as defined by the land needs of the majority of the rural and urban poor. Instead a few large landholders, and the animals

themselves, are privileged by the exclusion of peasantries from vast tracts of land and natural resources and state financial allocations. Policies and regulations that directly or indirectly orient land use towards minority capitalist classes and external markets have thus become a major site of contestation throughout Africa.

In most of Africa land use regulations and planning frameworks have been an ideological tool for maintaining unequal distribution of land and inequitable security of tenure. The regulation of land use, usually rationalised on the basis of the need to protect legitimate public interests, is often unevenly applied to different tenure systems and through this to different classes of landowners and land use systems. In many cases the imposition of land use regulations is intended to protect the interests of emerging agrarian capitalists rather than the public or national interest. In other cases the regulations may in theory protect the public interest but, because of unequal land distribution, their impact is to deny the excluded peasantry their legitimate right to state support. The question is whether these new generations of land use policies and regulations promote efficiency in the utilisation of land and labour resources and thus improve national development in general. The persistence of under-utilisation, low land productivity and external land use orientation suggests that economic policies have been an obstacle to agricultural transformation, while promoting new forms of control over land ownership and the production content for the benefit of narrow interests.

### **13 Land Reforms in Africa: Redistribution versus Tenure Reform**

African redistributive land reforms would be expected to involve restoring lands that are physically controlled by large landholders through the resettlement of displaced peasants and alienated semi-proletarians and the enlargement of peasant land areas using repossessed contiguous lands. Securing land rights of the poor mainly by re-allocating them the 'title' to independently hold the landholding and/or by upgrading the tenure conditions under which lands are rented is also relevant in parts of Africa where land rent and sharecropping have emerged, especially in West Africa. Redistributive land reforms are critical in large parts of southern, eastern and northern Africa, where highly unequal landholdings have produced landlessness and

land shortages. However limited redistributive land reforms had been attempted there since the late 1950s, while since the 1980s gradualistic market-based land reforms have been initiated in southern Africa. Land reform was only ‘radicalized’ recently in Zimbabwe. The need for redistributive land reforms would also be expected in other African countries where localised and regional enclaves of land concentration have emerged through gradual and piecemeal expropriation by the colonial and post-independence state and private actors.

Some of the stated objectives of land redistribution in Africa include:

- decongesting overpopulated areas expanding the base of productive agriculture;
- rehabilitating people displaced by war;
- resettling squatters, the destitute and the landless;
- promoting more equitable distribution of agricultural land; and
- de-racializing or expanding indigenous commercial agriculture.

These objectives are underpinned by the aim of addressing historical injustices of colonial land expropriation and to assert the right of access by ‘indigenes’. Land redistribution has tended to be severely circumscribed by market-oriented approaches to land acquisition and legal challenges to land expropriation mechanisms by large land owners, while the negotiated voluntary transfer of land has not occurred on a significant scale. In East Africa redistributive reforms were mainly pursued in Ethiopia and Kenya. Redistributive land reform processes in Africa span the 40-year history of national liberation, but the experiences vary according to the land questions faced in each country. Whereas different socioeconomic and political specificities determine the nature of land reforms carried out, the gradual shifts in the nature of national liberation struggles among the countries since the 1960s reflect changing ideological and political mobilisation of the social forces engaged in resistance to imperial rule and changing land reform strategies. For example land reform experiences in southern Africa exhibit a changing divide between radical nationalist-cum-socialist redistributive land reforms and liberal approaches. Where national liberation was decisively concluded, as in Mozambique and Angola, the land distribution question appears to have been broadly resolved,

although new sites of localised land concentration have emerged. Where liberation was only partially concluded, as in the main settler territories of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, negotiated settlements left both the national question and the land question relatively unresolved. In particular the racial dimensions of the national question were not adequately addressed, as structures of wealth, income and land distribution remained intact and protected by liberal democratic constitutions and market principles.

More radical land reforms entailed the nationalisation of colonial, foreign and settler landholdings, as in Zambia during the early 1970s and in Mozambique and Angola from the mid-1970s. Zambia and Tanzania pursued 'socialist' land and agrarian reforms based on state marketing systems and the reorganisation of land settlement and use (villagisation and rural development in Tanzania and resettlement and integrated rural development in Zambia), while Mozambique pursued land nationalisation with more intensive attempts at socialist transformation using state and cooperative farms. Angola, which started-off mired in civil war, did not pursue further significant land reform after land nationalisation. Civil war in the lusophone territories, fuelled by their relative international isolation and by South African destabilisation contained radical agrarian reforms there, and post-conflict land tenure reforms have re-introduced some land concentration. In contrast more liberal strategies of land reform were adopted in the colonial 'protectorates', which mostly experienced indirect colonial rule accompanied by minor degrees of white settlerism alongside cheap migrant labour systems (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland, Lesotho). Here land reform involved a limited degree of expropriation of lands accompanied by market-related compensation with some colonial finance, as was the case in Swaziland and Botswana. The expropriated land was 'indigenised' as large farms, with limited foreign and white minority large-scale land ownership and estate farming remaining alongside the emergence of state farms and resilient peasant and pastoral agrarian structures. Liberal approaches to land reform consisted mainly of limited market-led land redistribution efforts and attempts to modernise peasant agriculture within a contradictory context of imbalanced public

resource allocations focusing on the large-scale indigenised and state capitalist farming sub-sector, and agricultural export markets.

Zimbabwe and Namibia since the 1980s used the liberal state-centred but market-based approach to land transfers. Land was acquired by the state for redistribution on a willing-seller-willing-buyer basis, meaning that land identification and supply was market-driven. The governments identified the demand for land and, where possible, matched it with this private supply. These programmes were slow in redistributing land, except during the very early years in Zimbabwe, when the approach was accompanied by extensive land occupations on abandoned white lands. The use of compulsory land acquisition by the state, with or without compensation for land and improvements, was pursued mainly in the early independence periods, when expropriations with varying levels of compensation were adopted in Zambia and, since the 1990s, mainly in Zimbabwe. This approach involves direct intervention by government in the identification and acquisition of land. Another liberal approach to land redistribution, tried to a limited degree in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, is the 'market-assisted' approach espoused by the World Bank. This approach is meant to be led by beneficiaries, with support from the state, private sector and NGOs within a market framework. Very little land has been redistributed through this approach so far, mainly in South Africa. This approach was implemented in Malawi in 2005, using a World Bank loan in the context of the usual macroeconomic policy conditions. Finally a 'community-led self-provisioning' strategy has been followed in Zimbabwe, mainly in the form of 'illegal' land occupations by potential beneficiaries. This approach has tended to be either state-facilitated and formalised or repressed by the state at various points in time.

Despite all these approaches relatively little progress has been achieved in the implementation of redistributive land reform in Africa, while greater effort has been placed on land tenurial and land use regulatory reforms. However more progressive land tenure reforms to counter the general tenure insecurities and land grabbing processes facilitated by regressive state-led land tenure reforms are necessary. Current resistance to land marketization and 'individualization' schemes, as well as to the manipulative reform of land administration structures through the adaptation of

customary tenure procedures and institutions and new efforts to decentralise and reform land governance systems, is a response to the contradictions that confront progressive land tenure reform. However land tenure reform in Africa also requires institutional reforms that can defend the poor against potential land losses as well as accommodate those excluded (women, minorities, settlers) from increasingly scarce arable lands. Such tenure reforms would also need to be able to prevent and resolve conflicts over competing claims to land rights and ensure the fair administration of land rights and land use regulations. Whether the land tenure reforms required would include the ability to transact (rent and sell) and mortgage peasant lands, especially in the absence of measures to prevent land alienation and concentration, is as politically contentious as its feasibility is questionable.

The role of the African state in promoting equitable access to and control of land through tenure reforms has had the opposite effect of promoting increased land concentration. Existing African legal frameworks and institutions for managing land allocation and land use or dispute resolution tend to protect the interests of those with disproportionately larger land rights, including property rights derived from past expropriation, rather than the interests of the victims of these inequities. Indeed the literature on Africa's land tenure identifies weak land administration systems as the main issue of concern. Land administration reforms tend to be proposed within a neo-liberal conception of good governance, focusing on the decentralisation and democratisation of land institutions, enhancement of land administrative efficiency, broad-based representativity of local structures of land control and civil society participation in land administration, within a framework of introducing formal and statutory law into land management systems. The main purpose of these proposed reforms is to develop 'secure land tenure' regimes – and implicitly to make the institutions benign to market processes.

However, most African governments have yet to allocate the resources and build the capacities required to create these new systems of land administration. Decentralised land reform implementation processes have failed to take off, largely due to a lack of both financial resources and technical capacities, as well as the lack

of political will. Yet there is no doubt that African land management institutions pose vexing problems and that these constitute an important aspect of the land question. The institutional frameworks for land administration are exceedingly complex and fractured. There are numerous competing agencies involved in land administration, including line ministries and central government departments, large parastatals, urban and rural local authorities and traditional leaders. The responsibilities of these different agencies in different aspects of land administration within the different land tenure areas overlap and create confusion and conflict among the various players, thus posing difficulties for the creation of integrated and comprehensive land administration processes.

A truly democratic approach to land administrative reform would require that the basic principles of democracy – equity, efficiency, accountability, transparency, legitimacy, and participation – be the guiding criteria for resolution of land administrative problems. The concentration of administrative powers over land and natural resources in national authorities is the main obstacle. Popular demands for transparency reflect concerns over corrupt land and resource allocations, especially the tendency for state officials and political leaders to dominate licenses, leases and concessions. The land administration institutions also tend to be inaccessible and unrepresentative of local interests.

In many countries land administration remains highly centralised and unrepresentative, while the institutions that adjudicate land issues at the local level are widely dispersed and weak at best, a situation which tends to perpetuate centralised powers over customary land tenure regimes. Furthermore, as argues, there are limited channels for addressing land grievances and demands for land tenure reform. Rural popular organisations tend to be weak and dominated by lineage elders, a framework that has been reinforced by the state to prevent rural demands from being placed in a broader horizon beyond the community. Thus, since the territorial distribution of local ‘traditional’ authorities are generally based upon lineage/clan social structures with particular ethnic identities, land conflicts have tended to assume an explicit or implicit ‘ethnic’ character. Colonial administrations in

Africa universally created administrative and political districts around 'tribal' chiefdoms, which in many cases imposed regional centres of ethnically-based chiefly authority over groups that had in fact been autonomous, thus creating conflicted land administration structures. Moreover the preoccupation with formal land tenure reforms has tended to mean that most official land policies neglect redistributive aspects such as improving access to land, water, nature parks, forests and woodland resources by the poor, while efforts to improve environmental security, alleviate poverty and improve land and labour productivity tend to focus on small-scale palliatives in marginalised peasant lands.

#### **14 Agrarian Land Question and Rural Poverty in Post-1994 South Africa**

As a result of this systematic process of dispossession and exploitation taking place for more than three centuries, at the advent of a democratic political dispensation in 1994, South Africa was regarded as having one of the most skewed distributions of economic productive resources, income and wealth.

The outcomes of the 1994 negotiated settlement which maintained the key pillars of capitalism set necessary conditions for the reproduction of working class, including rural poverty. The willing-buyer-willing-buyer market driven productive property distribution model further blocked the prospects for radical land reform. In instances where land is transferred it is just for re-feudalization of society and moral reasons, NOT accompanied by serious economic support measures. This has also led to the strengthening of the power of the traditional leaders, whilst the rural masses are increasingly becoming the receipts of paternalistic welfarism and periodic election voting fodder for the political elite.

In an attempt to redress the economic inequalities referred to above, in 1994 the government formulated the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) followed by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in 1996. Using the latter the government put strong emphasis on state asset restructuring and privatisation, downsizing of the public sector and trade liberalisation aimed at reducing budget deficit.

Though GEAR produced results in terms of budget deficit decrease, improved revenue collection, skewed economic growth rate increase and, the economy kept on shedding jobs in their millions and strategies aimed at job creation could not stem the tide of unemployment, and interest rates still remained quite high proving disastrous for the smallholder farming sector.

The predominantly white agricultural sector was also affected under neo-liberal policy. It changed from a highly regulated and financially subsidised sector to a deregulated one with state support for inputs and mechanical services and price control on commodities abolished and marketing deregulated. Control boards were dismantled. These changes have produced contradictory outcomes within the agricultural sector. On one hand, the exclusively white commercial agriculture has become more competitive and productive. On the other hand, trade liberalization intensified competition within South African agriculture wiping out some of the white farmers. Many of the white farmers turned productive land into game farms as one of the responses to this competition. This has intensified the concentration and centralisation of agricultural capital in the hands of capitalist monopolies which also collude in setting prices for agricultural commodities. This concentration process has further contributed to the mass expulsion of farm labourers from the countryside, and to the undermining of the viability of many rural towns. Many of the current rural township “service delivery” protests are not unrelated to the impact of post-1994 agricultural liberalisation. Ironically, the liberalisation process which was meant to make our agricultural sector “more competitive” has also resulted in South Africa becoming a net food importer.

For the extremely underdeveloped smallholder farmers and particularly the beneficiaries of the land reform programme who opted for farming, deregulation proved extremely constraining and often disastrous. They were expected to compete and produce at the same levels of quantity and quality as the long and well-established commercial sector without putting in place any effective and transformative agricultural policy and programme for broadened and affordable access. The false characterisation of the country’s economy as consisting of two

economies (rather than a highly polarised single reality) – the first and the second economy – further reinforced the marginalisation and underdevelopment of the smallholder farmers and disadvantaged farming communities, particularly in the former Bantustans. To illustrate this, land reform beneficiaries are expected to take over existing complex, large scale farming operations without any changes in the patterns and relations of production. The argument is always that any restructuring in this regard would be disastrous for the economy (read “first economy”) because it would lower the levels of production and the quality of the product, hence, the introduction of joint ventures or strategic partnerships and AgriBEE to mitigate the risk of a negative impact on the economy (read again “first economy”).

The so-called first economy notion creates an impression that it is an almost flawless economy to which all must aspire. The assumption is that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with it. It supposedly only needs some little tinkering here and there rather than total transformation and restructuring. This reflects a failure to appreciate the fact that the so-called first economy was and still is the very cause of the impoverishment of the African majority and that its driving force remains that of exploitation and perpetuation of inequality though in a relatively different form (a non-racial one). Essentially, the so-called second economy is simply a reflection of the consequences of the exploitative nature of this first economy. It should also be added that the capital-intensive commercial agricultural sector is unsustainable in many respects – it is highly dependent on oil based inputs (diesel and petrol for farm machinery and for long-distance freight haulage, and oil-based fertilisers and pesticides) – as peak oil begins to bite, the financial and environmental sustainability of these forms of production will be severely compromised. The water usage patterns tend also to be unsustainable and climate change will further drastically impact upon this sector. The liberalisation of the mainstream agricultural sector means that we have abandoned to market forces what is now desperately needed – major strategic state-led interventions.

The Rural Development Task Team in the RDP office, hoped that rural development would contribute to the realisation of the objectives of GEAR by “diversified job

creation through local economic development; redistributing government expenditure to formerly deprived areas; an expansionary infrastructure programme to address service deficiencies and backlogs, while delivering infrastructure and essential services cost-effectively; social development in many fields, particularly education and health services, and through providing access to resources to improve household and national productivity; integrating marginal rural areas where the majority of citizens have been cut off from the national economy". They never thought that GEAR itself will be a major constraint in the achievement of these objectives. In the light of the shortcomings of GEAR mentioned earlier there was no way that these important objectives could be achieved. Probably, like many, they thought GEAR was a strategy to implement the RDP. Definitely it was not.

Implicit in the foregoing discussion of GEAR and the two-economy paradigm is the extent to which the working class, particularly the landless peasants in the rural areas, are subjected to what Francis (2006: 1) calls "the constraints thrown up by social relations and institutions that systematically benefit the powerful". In the final analysis it is clear that the process of conceptualisation of the economic policies, strategies and programmes that would eventually have a serious impact on the lives of the poor including those in the rural areas did not provide them an opportunity, not only to express their views, but to influence the direction that these should take in addressing their plight.

*"Poor people face chronic risks, which are institutionally and relationally generated, in the form of "inequality, class relations, exploitation, concentrations of unaccountable power and social exclusion" (Wood, 2003: 457). Such risks may force them to make choices that deliver short-term security, at the expense of longer-term reductions in the risks they face. These choices may include over strong reliance on family relations, or allegiance to more powerful people, in ways that perpetuate their dependence." (Francis, 2006: 4).*

Unlike the process that led to the RDP, the process of conceptualisation of GEAR and the two economy paradigm were driven by technocrats with virtually no input

from the people including the rural poor who later would be negatively affected by their impact. Of course, it could be argued that the decisions regarding these policies were taken by their democratically elected public representatives 'in their best interest'. However, the point is that in the real social world class relations result in power inequalities and exploitation of the vulnerable by the powerful. By virtue of their political clout and proximity to the echelons of power, public representatives tend to possess substantially more power and thus decision-making prerogative.

This state of differential power permeates all levels of society - local, regional, national and global. The International Fund for Agricultural Development says:

*“Poverty...is also a condition of vulnerability, exclusion and powerlessness - erosion of people’s capability to have their voices heard. Voicelessness is particularly acute for the rural poor who account for a majority,” (Transforming Rural Institutions, IFAD, 2003: 3).*

In the South African context, the institutions of the rural poor are either very weak or non-existent. This has rendered them powerless and unable to influence the processes of political and economic decision-making that affect their lives. They cannot, for instance, deal with institutional constraints such as high transaction costs when selling their produce and buying goods and services for their farming operations, constraints in the operation of the land market, inaccessible and unaffordable financial services and inadequate market information.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that though most poverty is rural, as will be shown later, even among rural communities including the poor, there is widespread inequality, class stratification, exploitation and exclusion. Apartheid produced both poverty and compressed social and economic class especially in the black rural areas “this process of class compression does not imply that the black majority constitutes an economically homogenous population” (my emphasis). So any rural development strategy aimed at poverty eradication must of necessity give serious consideration to this fact.

Despite the sometimes heated debates on conceptualisation, definition and measurement of poverty in South Africa, there seems to be consensus in South

Africa that though South Africa is ranked as an upper middle-income country, it has one of the most skewed distributions of assets. As a result 40% to 50% of South Africans live in poverty. It is estimated that about 65% of the poor are found in rural areas with an estimated total population between 17 million and 20 million. In summary, of the estimated 20 million people in rural areas about 15.6 million live in poverty. It is also worth noting that about 61% of Africans, 38% of Coloureds, 5% of Indians and 1% of Whites live in poverty. So, unsurprisingly, the extent and depth of poverty is race-related. This statistics suggests that any policy, strategy or programme including rural development policies, strategies and programmes aimed at poverty eradication must take into account the race gender as well as spatial character of poverty in South Africa.

### **15 Placing Distributive Justice at the Centre**

What then, are the options for an agrarian politics concerned with social equity in South Africa? A concern with *reparative* justice all too easily side lines a focus on present-day *distributive* justice, and a narrow focus on rights (including land rights) risks ignoring or legitimizing the social processes and relations of capitalist exploitation. What would it look like to put distributive justice and a concern with social inequality at the centre of agrarian policy? This is a complex issue, but it is possible to list some basic strictures, warnings and guidelines.

*Understand and accept the reality of urbanization.* To begin with, any agrarian policy needs to accept the ‘extreme and exceptional’ nature of the South African ‘land question’. Agrarian policy cannot be about ‘turning back the clock’. It has to be about equitable social transformation in the interests of South Africa’s poor as they exist at this moment in history – *including the urban poor*. Land and agrarian reform is not an exclusively ‘rural’ matter: it is about food security, economic justice and livelihoods both in town and in the countryside. This means that agricultural land should be seen as a valuable national resource – and that land reform policy should consider the food needs of the urban poor.

From this, it follows that *the challenges arising out of ‘the land question’ cannot be dealt with in terms of land policy alone*. The marginalization and structural exclusion

created by land theft (and by capitalist adverse incorporation) needs to be dealt with – but the response needs to take the form of a coherent policy for pro-poor growth that informs economic policy more generally. Similarly, the potent political charge created by the memories and transmitted histories of Apartheid injustices need to be dealt with – but it is only in a small minority of cases that they can be dealt with through the vehicle of land reform.

This does not mean that there is not a land question. *We should accept the reality of poor people's land demands: but this is not a demand for a return to an agrarian past.* It is a demand for tenure security and residential land that will allow for security, survival and 'accumulation from below' in the harsh and unforgiving context of the *present-day* South African economy. The key problem relates essentially to design of equitable human settlements, local government, land use and spatial planning. One question is how land reform can be used more assertively to reconfigure Apartheid's spatial legacy in rural areas. Another challenge is developing a sense of how tenure security and land-based activities form part of a mix of economic activities in peri-urban areas and denser rural settlements. We should, by the way, forgo the stirring and meaningless talk about 'vibrant rural communities' that characterizes development speak on this issue (e.g. DRDLR 2009). Such language merely encourages a flight into fantasy. We should focus instead on the reality of what's there – marginalized and hybrid livelihoods supported by remittances, social grants and informal self-employment – and figure out how these can be protected, sustained and encouraged to grow.

*We should recognize that we still lack convincing models of commercial agriculture that are economically equitable and environmentally sustainable.* Here, we are in a double bind. Large-scale commercial agriculture is unlikely to contribute to meaningful levels of employment, is unsustainably reliant on fossil fuels and agrochemicals, and without expensive racial transformation it will remain a political embarrassment. The potential of small-scale agriculture to deal with these difficulties is a matter of intense scholarly and/or political debate. Although small-scale agriculture may be more efficient in some respects, and though it is probably more employment intensive, small-scale farmers are poorly positioned to compete in centralized, buyer-driven value chains, are not necessarily more committed to

sustainable practices, and are unlikely to be able to meet the urban poor's demand for cheap food. More seriously, even if a small-farmer sector could in theory meet all these requirements, there is the small matter of getting there. Outcomes are path dependent, and transformation will be costly. There is a need to go beyond general and ideological battles around the virtues of small- versus large-scale farming; and to explore whether there are viable and workable models for change.

*A focus on land and agrarian reform that looks only at landownership and at primary production is misdirected, and will ignore the ways in which agribusiness and large corporations are transforming the agro-food sector in their own interests. A progressive agrarian policy will therefore need to focus on the contestation of power relations in the food system as a whole.* While land reform implementation has gone adrift, and while rural NGOs have focused on the outrage of human rights violations by a dwindling population of commercial farmers, the stable door is open and the horse has bolted: commercial restructuring of agriculture here and abroad is driving processes of jobless de-agrarianization for huge surplus populations who have been pushed off the land, but who are not being reabsorbed into non-farm employment. One challenge is developing approaches to reining in corporate power, and at the very least ensuring that value chain governance happens in more pro-poor ways. Another is finding ways of supporting the development of local food economies not entirely dominated by corporates, and in which small farmers and local vendors can participate.

What emerges, then, is a politics of agrarian reform that perhaps seems much more modest. The argument of this paper involves questioning the heroic role often thrust upon 'land reform' in popular imagination on the Left. Far from seeing land reform as a central, self-contained project of massive redistribution, it is better imagined as a *component* of a much more encompassing but also more constrained process of political and socio-economic change in South African society as a whole. Does this amount to legitimizing the 'status quo' in the South African countryside? I do not think so. A radical project of critique and fostering equitable social change in South Africa is possible. But such a project has to start with a recognition of the terrain as it exists *at this time*, not as we would wish it to be; with an accurate assessment of where the critical points of contestation really are – and with critical awareness of the often

unexamined underlying assumptions, desires and fantasies that animate and inform discussion about what is, and what should be, in our agro-food system.

## **16 The Need to Reform Inequitable South African Agrarian Structures**

Most of the rural poor in South Africa are landless or nearly landless, but they usually have some kind of access to agricultural land, with trusts and other holders said to be the owners of 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. 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 South Africa are often unable to provide themselves and their families with locally acceptable livelihoods. 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 and urban dwellers, however, are always of fundamental importance.

## **17 The YCLSA Role and Policy Position on Land for Youth**

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.

Twentieth century apologists of Western capitalism advance 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 are legally extinguished, although in practice this is 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 parts of the country, 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 land owner’s workers’ rights, and multiple other mechanisms. The fiction that a corporate entity and trusts, 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 pursue the issue of land and agrarian reform. What land reform implies in practice always depends on the context and particular circumstances, but the basic principles remain the same. YCLSA structures must advance and advocate for land and agrarian reform programme that will involve expropriating large holdings and redistributing them to 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. 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.

In an endeavour to build a popular, YCLSA structures must work with progressive NGO's and committed international organizations can play important roles as catalysts in helping grassroots organizations and landless movements organize and press their demands for land. YCLSA structures can help through research focused on the livelihood and sustainable development programmes of the rural poor. Structures of the YCLSA can provide valuable technical assistance, material resources and legal aid. They can facilitate the use of modern communication technologies by communities 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 people themselves, mobilized for the common program of the SACP in building a popular front.

### ***17.1 Youth in the Land reform Process***

A central debating point in the historiography of as well as policy matters on land in post-apartheid South Africa has mainly been the significance of race on one hand and class and gender dynamics on the other. A focus on youths and/or generational dynamics has been a very minor strand weaving through these debates. Mathivha (2012) writes that whilst such initiatives as the Agriculture Youth Development Initiative of 1998, Youth in Agriculture and Rural Development (YARD) of 2008, and the Department of Land Affairs' Youth Empowerment Strategy of 2008 have been introduced since 1994, none of these programmes is institutionalised and operational. The Department of Agriculture's Director General is on record as

admitting that “when we started with our land reform programme in 1994, we did not have specific programmes targeted at youth empowerment and this has resulted in few youths being beneficiaries of land and agrarian reform”. The National Development Plan, which is government’s main development blueprint out to 2030, outlines the three principles underlying land reform as (a) deracialising the rural economy, (b) democratic and equitable land allocation and use across *race, gender and class*, and (c) a sustained production discipline for food security (National Development Plan, 2012: 144). The generational/age factor is not fleshed out in similar ways as the race, gender and class factors yet it is as important as those three. The current radicalisation of the discourse on land reform may as well, therefore, be a perfect window of opportunity to seriously raise and engage with issues around enhancing youth land rights in South Africa given the fact that youths are also fully engaged in that discourse.

## **17.2 Socio-Economic and Political Rationale for Enhancing Youth Land Rights in South Africa**

Arguments for enhancing youth land rights in this paper are mainly centred on the redistribution aspect of the land reform process towards beneficiary *control and ownership* of land for farming and agricultural purposes. The restitution and tenure reform aspects primarily involve people historically associated with the lands involved thereby limiting access of new players onto those particular lands.

### **17.2.1 Socio-Economic Arguments**

Young people constitute 37% of the country’s population (The Presidency, 2015). They therefore constitute the biggest age category of the South African population. In the same vein, youth unemployment and associated poverty are among the greatest socio-economic challenges in South Africa. Youth unemployment rate in the country currently stands at an all-time high of 55% and has averaged 51% from 2013 to 2017 (Trading Economics, 2017). These figures may as well be interpreted as a

ticking socio-economic time-bomb because, if not addressed, the effects may include increased poverty, increased crime and drug-related gang culture and increased potential of political instability. It is in this context that enhancing youth land rights by opening up specific opportunities for them in the land reform process and supporting them in agriculture can go a long way in addressing the problems of unemployment, poverty, inequality, crime and food security in the country. South Africa's National Development Plan (2012) states that the agricultural sector has the potential to create one million jobs by 2030, which means enhancing youth land rights may be the most immediate means of catalysing employment for young people, positively transforming the livelihoods of youths, and economic growth.

### **17.2.2 Political Arguments**

The land issue serves as a glaring symbol of generalised oppression and dispossession and as Cousins (2017) argues, even in an urbanised country like South Africa, it resonates powerfully because of widespread inequality and chronic poverty. For many South Africans therefore, land inequalities carry a profound political charge. As long as the distribution of land continues to be racially skewed, political formations in the country will continue to invoke land dispossession and the need for redress as a way of mobilising supporters. A huge energetic, unemployed youth constituency may also be an easy tool of manipulation in driving these political agendas. Politicking with such an emotive issue as land, however, has the potential of destabilising a country's peace and economic development as happened in Zimbabwe with respect to that country's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of the early 2000s. Critics of the FTLRP argue that, faced with very high prospects of losing the 2000 general election to a formidable opposition, the ruling ZANU PF party invoked the land issue as its main campaign trump card and immediately engineered the chaotic fast track land redistribution process. FTLRP involved the massive and often violent expropriation of white-owned commercial farms without compensation. Many white commercial farmers and their farm workers were illegally displaced by veterans of that country's 1970s liberation war and youths aligned to the ruling party as encouraged by ruling party leaders. This exerted a

heavy toll on the country's agricultural sector with devastating effects on agricultural production, food security and the economy from which the country is yet to recover.

Cousins (2016b) argues that current political rhetoric on the land issue in South Africa draws on a narrative „in which white farmers are the villains, black South Africans are the victims, and the government (and/or opposition parties) are heroes rising to the rescue“. As already noted, in the context of high rates of youth unemployment and widespread inequality, the situation, if not speedily addressed, may remain prone to abuse by politicians especially towards election seasons. Enhancing youth land rights and mainstreaming youth development in the agricultural sector will therefore be one major step towards addressing the land situation in South Africa and averting chances of abuse of this emotive issue by political forces for self-serving political ends. Land reform in South Africa requires a new narrative towards an inclusive and progressive process that should take on board generational concerns in addition to the traditionally recognised race, class and gender issues. Enhancing youth land rights may, indeed, be an integral part of a genuine „radical economic transformation" vis-à-vis an inclusive agrarian reform process – a process which should encompass a rapid break from the past without significantly disrupting agricultural production and food security.

### **17.2.3 Enhancing Youth Land Rights towards an Inclusive and Progressive Land Reform Process in South Africa**

This section discusses ideas on pathways to an inclusive and progressive land reform process in South Africa going forward, which could contribute in directing manoeuvres towards genuine and well-planned socio-economic transformation in the country. Whilst an inclusive and progressive land reform process has to take into account the interests of all hitherto marginalised groups, including women and the disabled, this section zooms specifically on youths as that is the main thrust of the paper. The section therefore discusses specific ways through which youth land rights may be enhanced in South Africa and the challenges and opportunities involved.

#### **17.2.4 Discarding the ‘One-Size-Fits-All’ Approach to Land Reform**

One of the main problems with the land reform process in South Africa has been little flexibility vis-à-vis accommodating the needs and constraints of different categories of people. Beneficiaries have often been treated as a homogeneous group and defined in very broad and almost exclusively racial terms yet people are socially differentiated. Key categories of people intended to benefit are not specified clearly enough yet different groupings of people have different needs and constraints. Youths are a separate and key grouping whose needs and constraints should be clearly spelt out in the land reform process vis-à-vis access to land, provision of implements and inputs, business skills, access to information, opportunities and markets. As noted earlier on, even among the youths there are various sub-groups. Policy makers should therefore make efforts to understand the challenges, opportunities, perceptions and aspirations of different youth sub-groups vis-à-vis land across geographical, racial, gender and class divides.

#### **17.3.5 Provision of Clear Agricultural Information, Knowledge, Farming Techniques and Inputs Targeted at Young People**

What complicates the position of most youths in South Africa vis-à-vis the land reform process includes scepticism regarding the economic viability of agriculture, lack of skills, low-levels of school education, and low social capital. Targeting youths in the land reform process should therefore be anchored on a value-chain approach encompassing a wide-range of activities which include providing them with the necessary inputs, extension training that assists them with technical and managerial skills, capital for purchasing or leasing equipment, and facilitating their access to high value markets (AGRA, 2015). In addition, policy makers should make concerted initiatives targeted at youths to present farming more effectively as a business opportunity rather than as an occupation for the aged, the illiterate and for people living in rural areas. Political parties and the media specifically have a major role in this process of changing negative perceptions around farming among the youths.

### **17.3.6 Accelerating the Land Redistribution Exercise**

If land and agriculture more broadly is to be used to improve the position of youths in South Africa, then agricultural land must be redistributed more speedily and on a far bigger scale than is currently happening. This may not necessarily require a change in the Constitution to allow for the government to expropriate land without compensation as some political players are clamouring for at the moment, but it may require a radical shift in and realignment of government priorities<sup>4</sup>. A key aspect of this priority shift will be to substantially increase the budget on land reform primarily so as to allow for the accelerated purchase of more land for redistribution. An increased budget will also allow for the extensive training of extension staff in the provinces as well as increased skills and input support. It is remarkable that land reform's share of the national budget has never exceeded one percent. He notes that in the 2014 budget for example, the total allocation to the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) was less than a third of that allocated to the Department of Human Settlements for national housing delivery, reflecting far greater government priority to deal with housing backlog in urban areas. Government priorities may therefore have to change to reflect the significance that land has assumed in national political and economic discourses in recent years.

### **17.3.7 Socialist Sustainable Land Reform Programme**

Land reform underpinned by capitalist private interests is not the answer. It is a problem. Moving land from one set of capitalist private hands to another will still leave the majority, now and in future, landless and excluded from land ownership and access to other natural resources. Land and natural resources are the shared heritage of our society. No human being or person, no private company, no collective of individuals or private companies has the capacity to create land or natural resources. The ultimate aim of land reform and transformation of the ownership of natural resources must be socialisation; collective ownership; ownership by the people as whole!

On the above score - **and this must be elaborated legislatively as part of our immediate tasks** - land must be allocated equitably for productive use. Unused land must be allocated to those who will use it productively. However, this must be buttressed by, and go hand in hand with, the Freedom Charter's provision for the state to support the workers, and based on redress, with material resources and capacity building. This must include education and training. But education and training in this regard must not be confined to one going to some school, college or university that is distant from production. Education and training to develop productive capacity in support of land reform should be expanded and delivered through workplace training programmes. Co-operatives development must be encouraged and accordingly supported to play an increasingly predominant role.

The same must apply, in accordance with the Freedom Charter, to ownership of monopoly industries. As part of this ultimate goal of socialisation, there must be a heavy progressive or graduated income tax to look after societal needs, with the working class as the immense majority and everyone supported to exercise their right - and responsibility - to work.

The ultimate goal of socialisation is not opposed to private ownership. Everybody's right to own property - other than natural resources - must be protected for so long as that property is a product of their own hard work and not the labour of others. The private accumulation of property from other people's hard work, rather than from one's own hard work, is actually an act of arbitrary deprivation of property. This capitalist exploitation is, in essence, expropriation without compensation. True social justice and emancipation will abolish such and other forms of unjust social relations of property.

We must now build a social movement aware not only of the racially based expropriation of the past and committed to the elimination of its legacy but also of the desire of the black élite to act as the "representatives" of the majority and thus continue to deprive them of their birth right in the name of "black empowerment". As part of this effort it is crucial to build sufficient capacity both to withstand and overcome conservative reaction opposed to the course of true democratic

transformation. Our efforts must include decisive action against those who would seek to hijack land reform in order to become the new exploiters of the masses.

## **18 Conclusion**

Land reform is an important aspect of social and economic transformation in South Africa, as a means both of redressing past injustices and of alleviating the pressing problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality. The current heated contestations around the land issue in South Africa present opportunities to raise critical points around the inclusion of hitherto 'forgotten' but very important groups of people such as youths in the land reform process. Youths constitute the biggest age category of the South African population and a genuine „radical socio-economic transformation“ in the country can only be fully realised when the youths are fully mobilised, incentivised and equipped for participating in such key economic sectors as agriculture. Enhancing youth land rights towards an inclusive and progressive land reform process will therefore be critical in simultaneously dealing with the problems of increasing youth unemployment, poverty and widespread inequality bedevilling South Africa.