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Land Reform: A Revised Agenda for the 21st Century

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I. LAND REFORM: SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The continuing great importance of agriculture to the well-being of people in poorer countries is not commonly known in the industrialized world. An estimated forty-five percent of the world's population still makes its living primarily from agriculture, depending directly on the land for their income, security, and status. In many traditional less-developed countries, and a number of the economies in transition, these agricultural families still constitute a substantial majority of the population. However, great numbers of these agricultural families lack a stable and predictable relationship to the land they farm, and thus face serious economic insecurity. How to decisively improve that relationship – the question of “land reform” – thus persists as a central issue in much of the world. In less-developed countries, roughly 100 million farm families, comprising about 500 million people, lack ownership or owner-like rights to the land they cultivate. Most make their living as tenant farmers or agricultural laborers. The tenant farmers typically pay high rents and have little security of possession from season to season. The agricultural laborers generally work for extremely low wages and often as itinerants.

These half-billion people are among the poorest on earth. They constitute majorities, or near-majorities, of the agricultural populations of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras. In addition, they are a significant part of the agricultural population in a number of other countries, ranging from Zimbabwe and Egypt to Nepal and Venezuela.

Although the number of desperately poor tenant-farmer and agricultural-laborer families is very large, it would be larger still had it not been for a series of major land reforms carried out over the past century.

These reforms can be categorized into two groups. In one group of countries, nearly all land-reform beneficiaries ended up with individual family farms, held in ownership or owner-like tenure. These included Finland, Poland, Yugoslavia, Mexico, Bolivia, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, as well as Kerala and West Bengal States in India.

In the second group of countries, the great majority of land-reform beneficiaries ended up in large collective farms that proved, over time, to be inefficient and authoritarian in nature. These included the countries of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe (other than Poland and Yugoslavia), Cuba, Ethiopia, China, Vietnam, and North Korea.

Over the last 20 years, however, most of the countries in this second group have begun to turn away from communist command economies, and more toward market-oriented systems. In most of these countries, a “second generation” of land reform issues has arisen as a key part of this transition. In these transitional economies, the second-generation land-reform challenge is to give the roughly 200 million households (about one billion people) who had been on collective farms the possibility of farming as individual families with stable, long-

term, and transferable rights to their land. These “second generation” land reforms have, as we shall describe, actually progressed much further in the past two decades than the land reform measures still needed for tenant and laborer families in traditional less-developed countries.

Our principal focus in this report will be on the tenant farmers, agricultural laborers and collective-farm workers who make up the great bulk of those lacking a secure and predictable relationship to the land. There is, however, a third, much smaller, group of agricultural families who also have insecure tenure, often on public lands. Some of these are squatters who have moved onto the land in a desperate search for land to farm. Others represent more traditional holders who have occupied the land for decades or more and hold rights recognized by customary law, but not by the society’s formal law. Many of these holders are now in conflict with resettlers, ranchers, loggers or miners who have recently come upon the land (for example, in some parts of Indonesia, Brazil, and the Philippines). We shall also deal briefly with some aspects of the squatter and customary rights problems.

II. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF LAND REFORM

Given that land is the primary source of income, security and status for hundreds of millions of families, it is not surprising that decisively improving their relationship to the land can serve a number of development purposes. Land reform can, and often has, led to increased crop production, improved nutrition for poor households, a foundation for sustained and inclusive economic growth, more democratic societies, reduced social unrest and instability, better environmental stewardship, reduced urbanization, and improved access to credit.

A. Increased Crop Production and Nutritional Welfare

As to crop productivity gains resulting from land reform, there is cogent international evidence on four points. First, smaller holdings generally outproduce larger ones, hectare for hectare. Second, and related, family-operated farms generally outproduce collective farms and those largely dependent on wage laborers. Third, on any given holding, a cultivator with ownership or secure, long-term owner-like tenure is far more likely to make long-term capital and “sweat-equity” investments that improve and conserve the land than will a cultivator with insecure tenure. Finally, a cultivator with ownership or owner-like tenure is also more likely to use improved (and more expensive) seeds, fertilizer, and other inputs than will a tenant in the typical tenancy arrangement where the tenant pays for all inputs and receives only a portion of the output.

Additionally, even apart from potential increases in crop productivity, research shows that access to land has a substantial impact on nutritional welfare. Land reform in traditional settings improves the lives of beneficiary families, typically among the poorest of the poor, by letting them keep a significant portion of the crop that would otherwise go to the landlord or plantation owner.

B. Foundation for Economic Growth

Land reform also has generated increased overall economic activity. As a broad base of agricultural families benefiting from land reform receive higher incomes, they enter the marketplace to purchase goods and services, ranging from improved housing to schoolbooks, from bicycles to sewing machines. This increased demand stimulates the creation of non-farm employment. Thus, a dynamic agriculture has significant forward and backward linkages to broader societal development. Research confirms that a broad-based distribution of land assets not only benefits the poor, but becomes a solid basis for sustained and inclusive economic growth.

C. Facilitating Democracy and Reducing Conflict

As land-reform beneficiaries increase their incomes and become more economically secure and confident, their ability to participate in the political process is strengthened. Initially, land reform beneficiaries may be empowered to make demands for a fairer share of government-administered programs and services. Land reform creates more secure and self-confident producers who are willing to challenge the inertia, elitism, and neglect that frequently characterize the politics of underdevelopment.

In addition, land reform has had fundamental consequences for reducing political instability by eliminating basic grievances arising from the relationship with the erstwhile landowner. Many of the past century's most violent civil conflicts ensued where land issues were ignored.

Land reform can address the most basic rural grievances and increase commitment to a system in which new demands are energized and negotiated. With the fading of revolutionary marxism as a mobilizing ideology, outright civil war (as happened in Mexico, Spain, China, and Vietnam) may be less likely, but “low intensity” violence can still create great instability as a result of unmet grievances over land — whether through land invasions in Zimbabwe or Brazil, peasant-supported alliances with drug lords in Colombia, or desperate migrants seizing indigenous lands in the Philippines.

D. Other Benefits

Three additional benefits to land reform can be identified. First, long-term, secure rights to land foster environmental stewardship and sustainable farming practices. Moreover, in specific settings such as Brazil, Indonesia, or the Philippines, reallocation of secure rights to existing cultivated land may also have an important environmental impact through forestalling landless peasants from descending on, cutting down, and burning the forest in the desperate search for a piece of land to farm.

Second, many other landless families are driven by their poverty into the cities. Effective land-reform measures give landless peasant families a stake in their village society, reducing pressures that lead to premature and excessive urbanization.

Third, secure land rights that are transferable also acquire a predictable market value, and can be used as collateral, “cashed out” for non-agricultural investment or retirement, or passed on as wealth to the next generation.

The benefits of land reform described here apply, in general, not only for land reforms carried out to benefit tenant farmers and agricultural laborers in traditional less-developed-country settings, but also for land reforms that permit former collective-farm workers in the transitional economies to obtain secure rights to land of their own. They, too, invest, increase production, gain income, consume more, become empowered and less aggrieved, increase their stewardship, and strengthen their rural attachments.

Secure long-term land rights are not always, by themselves, sufficient to achieve all of these multiple goals, but in most settings — both traditional and transitional — they are necessary for the achievement of all or most of them. Perhaps no single, identifiable measure comes as close as land reform to cutting the Gordian knot of underdevelopment in so many societies.

III. WHY IS LAND REFORM OFTEN NEGLECTED?

Given the importance of the land problem in so many societies, and the multiple development goals served by land reform, the relative lack of attention paid to the land-reform issue in development circles, in foreign-aid programs, and in the media is striking. Only rarely, and typically when the issue has become a focus of violence or demagoguery (as in Zimbabwe currently), does it seem that even glancing attention is paid. Massive programs of reform — such as the current program to give long-term, secure land rights to China’s 195 million farm families, now halfway to completion — receive hardly a single line of print or frame of TV coverage in the media of the developed countries.

Why has there been such lack of attention from the developed countries? One reason is that the issue of land reform, unlike ongoing development issues such as childhood diseases, family planning and international debt, tends to arise in its conspicuous form only at discrete moments in time. Thus, the media, the public, and foreign aid agencies do not consistently focus on the need for programmatic responses. The media and public, in particular, are sorely lacking in education on the importance of the land issue. Another reason is probably that, where the issue does finally receive some attention, it is often because it has been seized upon and dramatized by demagogues or violent elements. Thus, instead of being the subject of thoughtful study, planning, and response via a non-violent and democratic alternative, it is likely to generate a negative reaction as being “what the bad guys want”.

Moreover, except for the narrow “window of opportunity” in a particular country where a unique combination of factors makes comprehensive land reform a genuine possibility, local leadership and elites are often opposed to any serious land reform measures because the reform may threaten their short-term interests. Such opposition and the related political

controversy and sensitivity it engenders have tended to make both bilateral and multilateral foreign-aid agencies shy away from public focus on the land-reform issue as too controversial, even where they privately recognize its importance. This is especially true in traditional less-developed countries where land reform options center on redistributing private land. Second-generation reforms, because they typically involve state-owned land, involve relatively less political controversy and thus have received more attention from foreign-aid agencies.

Like many other needed structural or redistributive reforms, experience indicates that the long-term gains from comprehensive and redistributive land reform far outweigh the short-term pains relating to political sensitivity or controversy. Political realities, however, do not always allow for much-needed reforms that make long-term economic and social sense. In many cases, the political obstacles can be overcome (see section IV, below). However, policymakers, activists, and potential beneficiaries should not throw up their hands if the political obstacles to achieving comprehensive, redistributive reforms cannot be overcome. Instead, it is crucial to recognize a variety of less ambitious land reform measures that may still be capable of providing widespread and effective benefits (see section VII, below).

IV. "SECOND GENERATION" LAND REFORMS

Land reform has played a major role in development and stability in virtually all of the countries listed earlier in which it has been carried out without collectivization. While land reforms that led to collectivization proved almost universally to be failures, many of these countries are undertaking "second generation" reforms aimed at reorganizing state and collective farms into family-size units and introducing market-oriented land systems. These "second generation" land reforms appear well on the way to playing a major beneficial development role in many of the formerly collectivized agricultures, notably for the approximately 195 million farm households of China. These families received individual land plots during the 1980-83 decollectivization process, although they held that land insecurely. They could be moved from plot to plot through periodic "readjustments" in the name of maintaining absolute equality of distribution as household size changed. Despite these shortcomings, the change from collective farming to individual (even though insecure) tenure created the conditions for increasing crop production by more than 80% in less than a decade. China is now well into a new land-reform process that is giving these families, totaling about 850 million persons, more secure and transferable 30-year rights, embodied in individual land contracts.

Extensive decollectivization with ownership or long-term rights to the farmers has also occurred now in Vietnam, the Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia), Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and some of the smaller former Soviet states (Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Armenia).

Even in Russia, though agriculture is still mostly collectivized, the small plots given in full individual ownership in 1992, which comprise about 5% of cropland, now produce roughly one-half of the total value of agricultural production, up from 25-30% in Soviet times.

V. FACTORS THAT MAKE LAND REFORM POSSIBLE

While need for land reform remains great in many traditional less-developed countries and transitional economies, the political obstacles are often substantial. The lack of political will or the existence of substantial political controversy, however, were also present shortly before many non-violent, democratic land reforms in the latter half of the twentieth century. The factors that played important roles in overcoming political obstacles to land reform in recent decades may provide lessons as we assess the prospects for 21st century land-reform efforts. Over the last half of the twentieth century, there appear to have been at least eight such factors.

1. Building effective grassroots support for land-reform measures (for example, through indigenous non-governmental organizations) and forming linkages to political parties have been important factors in determining whether land-reform measures will be adopted and whether land reform, once legislated, will actually be implemented. Such grassroots support and political linkages played a significant role in reforms in El Salvador, in the Indian states of Kerala and West Bengal, and also in many of the transitional economies where decollectivization and privatization of land have been carried out. Grassroots support is likely to be even more important in the future for two reasons. First, many countries where land reform is still needed are now, at least de jure and often de facto, political democracies. Second, technological advances in communication provide vehicles for NGOs to more effectively organize and publicize the conditions of the rural poor.
2. Political will for land reform vested in a strong central authority, such as General MacArthur in Japan or Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, has been important in the past. Authoritative action from the center may still play a key role in settings such as China, but in the future this variable seems likely to be of diminishing importance.
3. The threat of revolutionary uprisings has sometimes played an important role in making land reform politically possible. Willingness to seriously consider land reform in the Philippines seems to have varied over time with the fortunes of rural revolutionaries. The guerrilla threat was also a factor in El Salvador in the 1980s and in the early 1970s land reform in South Vietnam. With the general demise of revolutionary marxism, this variable has receded in significance and, in any case, has little relevance to “second generation” land reforms.
4. The “carrot” is of increasingly greater importance than the “stick” as a factor in the traditional less-developed countries. The prospect of credible financial support

for land reform has often been an important variable, and the lack of financial resources has limited otherwise possible land-reform efforts. In particular, credible compensation for the taking of privately owned land may substantially reduce the amount of grassroots pressure or central-authority determination otherwise necessary to accomplish a given degree of reform, by reducing landowner opposition and by helping to legitimize reform for significant sectors of public opinion. However, substantial increases in the value of privately owned land in many countries over recent years, especially in settings where there is high population pressure on land, have reduced the quantity of land that can be acquired with a given amount of financial resources.

5. The factor of ideology has played a recent role in democratic land reform in much of Eastern Europe and in some parts of the former Soviet Union. There, some post-communist governments have espoused an active policy of decollectivization, often linked to restitution of land rights to the small and medium farmers (or the heirs of those farmers) who lost such rights under collectivization.
6. Public education can also be an important factor, especially in democratic settings. Educating the public and policymakers that land reform can bring extensive economic and social benefits may help crystallize the will to carry out land reform. We see public education as a crucial factor in the 21st century.
7. Likewise, the availability of technical assistance can be an important factor. Educating policymakers, and also the public, about specific solutions to the technical issues involved in particular land-reform settings may also help crystallize the will to carry out land reform.
8. Finally, external support, in the form of technical assistance and financial assistance can be another important variable. Support and encouragement from outside played an important role in the South Vietnamese and Salvadoran land reforms, as it did in the post-World War II reforms in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. The same may be true currently in some of the transitional economies where land reform measures are a part of the market reforms that figure in IMF and World Bank support or in prospects for accession to the European Union. But such external support is rare today in the traditional developing countries. Nevertheless, it can still play an important role.

VI. LAND REFORM DESIGN: LESSONS FROM THE 20TH CENTURY

Once the will to carry out land reform has crystallized, what have been the key program-design lessons growing out of the accumulated experience? We highlight eleven basic points relating to land reform as carried out in the traditional less-developed countries during the 20th century, and then turn to similarities and differences of “second generation” land reforms being carried out in transitional economies.

A. Lessons From Traditional Less-Developed Countries

First, if a substantial portion of the rural landless are to benefit, there has rarely been an effective substitute for the mandatory (but compensated) taking of private land as the basis for redistribution. Countries sometimes pursue other alternatives, including "resettlement" on uncultivated public lands, strict regulation of the landlord-tenant relationship, or voluntary sale and purchase of land through "land bank" or "market-assisted" mechanisms. While such alternatives have sometimes provided marginal benefits, they have shown little promise for widespread impact. Resettlement programs have generally been costly, disruptive, and environmentally damaging. Ongoing regulation of the continuing landlord-tenant relationship has proven impractical and even counter-productive. (Egypt, the sole major success story, reversed its protective regulations under landlord pressure in the mid-1990s. West Bengal State is often cited as a success story, but a large number of tenants were evicted before protections became effective for the rest.) And voluntary "land banks," "market-assisted land reform," and "negotiated land reform" programs have not yet proven effective at redistributing substantial amounts of land.

Second, it is critical that the state provides reasonable compensation to private landowners whose land is taken for redistribution. Besides the political argument (the absence of compensation virtually guarantees grave instability and probably bloodshed), there are good legal and ethical arguments for reasonable compensation, regardless of the de facto coercive power of the government. This compensation need not always equal full market value, but both market value and the flow of income from the land should probably be taken into account. Substantially less than "market value" is usually sufficient to produce the same ongoing flow of income that had been produced by the land taken, but this may be inadequate in those settings where the gap between market value and the capital fund needed to reproduce the annual income flow is considerable. Also, if a portion of compensation to owners is deferred and paid in government bonds, those bonds should normally be inflation-adjusting, and former landowners should be able to use a portion of any bonds issued to them as preferred collateral in obtaining loans for various productive investments. Beneficiaries in many settings should also be required to repay the government something for the land.

Third, to ensure widespread benefits, a land reform should be of sufficient scope, or universality, to reach most potential beneficiaries. This means that, wherever possible, laborers as well as tenants, and non-permanent laborers as well as permanent ones, should benefit from the process. Benefits, however, need not be uniform. For example, in the Kerala land reform, tenant farmers received full-sized parcels, while some agricultural laborers received ownership of tiny garden plots.

Fourth, providing even small plots can produce substantial benefits. In any case, the maximum per-family quantity of land allocated to beneficiaries should be the amount a family can intensively farm with its own labor and modest capital. Some land reforms have

provided per-family holdings far larger than necessary. The distribution of larger holdings can severely limit the number of potential beneficiaries. Rather than providing an idealized holding size, it is generally better to calculate the area likely to be available under the particular land-reform's acquisition formula and divide that amount by the number of families needing land. The resulting quotient should be the maximum for per-family allocations. (One private report criticized the 1980-81 land reform in El Salvador for not giving a "vital minimum" of 9 hectares to each beneficiary family, without realizing that such a pattern of distribution would have required distributing twice the land area of the entire country.) Governments should recognize that every recipient family will be made substantially better off than they presently are, even if the size of their new holding is not "ideal" or "viable" as a sole source of income. The agricultural laborers in Kerala State who received tiny garden plots found themselves considerably better off; and there is strongly supportive evidence on the benefits of owning micro-plots from such diverse settings as Russia and Indonesia. Land reform neither creates nor destroys land: what it does is put an existing agricultural population into a relationship with an existing land base that is fairer and more productive than it was before.

Fifth, overall costs per beneficiary family must be kept as low as feasible in order to benefit the maximum number of tenant farmers and agricultural laborers. Available resources should be focused initially on the sine qua non of acquiring land for redistribution. Excessive per-family allocation of resources must be avoided in ancillary programs such as credit, and some costly benefits such as new housing may need to be omitted entirely.

Sixth, land reforms must also focus on intra-household allocations of land rights. Most past land reform programs, even those cited as successes, have ignored gender issues. Women have limited rights to land throughout much of the world, even though they are often responsible for producing much of the food. It is important to understand how reform or reallocation of land rights may impact women differently than men, and to ensure that steps are taken to avoid discriminating against women. Providing women with strong legal rights to land can have important efficiency, welfare, and employment effects.

Seventh, customary law and land tenure regimes must be understood and considered when undertaking land reform initiatives. Some supposed land reforms have been attempts to replace customary land-tenure regimes that still exist in some parts of the world — especially areas of less population density, forested and grazing areas, or areas of indigenous peoples — with more "modernized" land rights. While some changes over time may be appropriate, it is vital to recognize that most customary land-rights regimes have evolved over a long period of time, and that such regimes can function with a high degree of equity and environmental awareness. Rather than wholesale replacement of customary regimes in the name of "modernization", new written law should generally attempt to reflect and incorporate customary law and legal institutions, at the same time recognizing that "custom" itself has the characteristic of adaptability and often changes over time.

Eighth, program administration should involve beneficiaries, serve beneficiaries, and be well-publicized to beneficiaries. Determinations on such initial questions as who owns the land, who has been cultivating it, and what it produces are best made or confirmed by cultivator-dominated, local-level administrative committees. In some settings, grassroots farmer unions or organizations may play this role. Beneficiaries should not be required to leave the locality to complete simple applications for benefits, or to do so under the watchful (and often intimidating) eyes of local elites. The land-reform program and beneficiaries' rights should be repetitively publicized at the local level using local media or other means that will effectively communicate such information.

Ninth, excessive restrictions on land sale and lease markets in a post-reform environment to “protect” the beneficiaries can have perverse results. Such restrictions on selling and leasing land have often been imposed to prevent improvident sales by the new, small landowners or to thwart the growth of new “exploitative” tenancy arrangements. While some limited restrictions on land markets can be warranted in a given setting, excessive restrictions can deprive farmers of access to credit and reduce the flexibility frequently needed for successful farm management.

Tenth, land reform beneficiaries should not be forced into a particular mode of farm organization. Choice of farm organization is best made by farmers themselves, and the legal framework should offer a variety of alternatives.

Finally, collecting and analyzing data is crucial during all phases of a land reform. Advance collection of overall data regarding the numbers and composition of landless families, distribution and concentration of land ownership, and production, rent and land incomes is important to program design and administration. In addition, ongoing monitoring of program implementation, at least by rapid appraisal methods and, if possible, by periodic sample surveys as well, have proven important for identifying problems and making refinements if such problems arise.

B. Lessons from Transition Economies

“Second generation” land reforms in the transitional economies involve many, but not all, of the same program-design issues. The land to be redistributed is normally owned by the state or collective, so compensation usually is not necessary. Universality is achieved by giving all members of the collective, including pensioners, a right to receive land individually (made complicated in some parts of Eastern Europe by giving preference to pre-collectivization land owners and their heirs), and making all or nearly all collective land subject to such redistribution (this is subject to large “exemptions” in a few countries, including Russia). Because there is typically no payment required for land, costs are generally low. Needs for participatory administration and for monitoring are similar to those found in traditional developing countries, and gender and customary law issues must likewise be considered.

Besides the complex issue of restitution to former owners that has arisen in Eastern Europe, three new program-design issues have generally arisen in those “second generation” land reform settings where the collectives have not broken up quickly and decisively. These are first, how to give collective-farm members various options on a continuing basis (farm collectively, withdraw with a small group, or withdraw as a household). Second, how to allow animals, machines, and other non-land assets to be withdrawn together with land. Third, how to permit interim arrangements such as short-term leasing to the collective while a family decides what it wants to do in the longer term.

Finally, the important issues surrounding land market development take on more prominence in “second generation” reforms. Building the legal and policy framework and institutional mechanisms to enable farmers to transfer land rights by lease, sale, inheritance, and mortgage (while including, where necessary and reasonable, safeguards to prevent improvident transfers) is important and difficult in settings where land markets have not existed for decades.

VII. AGENDA FOR LAND REFORM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

For most of the twentieth century, the dominant set of principles, or agenda, for “land reform” in non-marxist settings was compulsory acquisition of defined lands from private landlords or plantation owners and redistribution of such lands to tenant farmers or agricultural laborers in small-to-medium sized farms. Sometimes “land reform” also meant compulsory regulation of the landlord-tenant relationship or resettlement onto (supposedly) uncultivated public lands, approaches that were nearly always unsuccessful.

It seems highly likely, however, that the first decades of the twenty-first century will see a substantially revised agenda for land reform. This revised agenda, while reaffirming that provision of secure land rights to very large numbers of households remains one of the highest development priorities, must build upon the cumulative past experience, and at the same time be advertent to current needs and possibilities in a number of ways:

- In traditional developing countries, large-scale land reform programs that redistribute vast amounts of privately-owned land to tenant farmers or landless laborers (while fairly compensating former owners) will be politically feasible only in rare situations.
- “Second generation” land reforms that undo the vast damage caused by involuntary collectivization in the transitional economies will continue to be a central challenge. This will include: (1) provision of longer-term, more secure, and transferable land rights in countries that have already decollectivized, such as China and Vietnam; (2) measures to facilitate voluntary decollectivization in countries where that has not yet happened, such as Russia and Ukraine; and (3) measures to introduce alternatives to collectivization for the first time in the few settings (such as North Korea) where that has not yet occurred.
- In many settings, land-market prerequisites will need to be further established, including secondary institutions such as registration and mortgage that will help support and protect land rights, and give such rights a value.
- In many of the traditional less-developed countries, a combination of socioeconomic factors -- including population pressure and high costs of land -- and political factors will likely make distribution of micro-plots or house-and-garden plots more feasible and desirable than continuing efforts to distribute “full size” farms. Even tiny plots may, in many settings, provide a substantial increment to family nutrition and income, increased status and wage bargaining power, freedom from the money lender, and a place for one’s own house. Such measures can be affordable even if reasonably high market values must be paid for land. (It must be recognized that a redistribution of micro-plots cannot carry the full range of benefits described in section II.)

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- The failed approaches via resettlement and attempts to regulate the continuing landlord-tenant relationship will be largely abandoned, except in very special and compelling circumstances (e.g., in South Africa there may have to be some resettlement from the former “homelands”, and in West Bengal tenancy regulation may actually work for remaining tenants, with the costs in evictions already borne). In many settings where such failed approaches have led to unintended, negative consequences, efforts may be needed to undo aspects of the failed reforms.
 - There will be more attention paid to safeguarding and assuring customary land rights of the poor, including rights to forest land and grazing land. That is, as well as land reform that helps the poor to gain land rights, there will be efforts that help to formalize or otherwise protect the poor’s existing customary rights to land.
 - There will be new attention to intra-household allocation of land rights, with efforts to ensure greater rights for women in the enjoyment, disposition, partitioning, and inheritance of land.
 - There will be more systematic attempts to find timely compromise solutions to forestall efforts to secure land for the poor that are violent, confiscatory, and anti-democratic (and which may lead to backlashes which further undermine democracy, the rule of law, and the position of the poor).
 - There may still be a few cases where land is cheap and plentiful enough (such as unused or grossly underutilized land in parts of South America or Africa) to employ the old approach of redistributing full-size farms to a large number of beneficiaries.
 - In some settings, there may also be a supplementary role for “market assisted land reform” or “negotiated land reform” in which funding is provided to needy families to acquire private land that is being voluntarily offered for sale. Such schemes require further testing in pilot projects before being widely pursued.

VIII. THE ROLE OF FOREIGN DONORS

In the context of this revised agenda, and given the centrality of land reform as a tool for development, what are the policy implications for the industrialized democracies? How can countries where programs of land reform are greatly needed be encouraged and assisted to introduce and implement such programs?

Foreign-aid donors should stand ready to provide important support affecting at least three of the major variables likely to determine whether land reform occurs in a given country setting.

First, aid donors should provide technical assistance and financial support to indigenous non-governmental organizations, labor organizations, or other broad-based groups which are able to perform essential grassroots organizing on the land-reform issue.

Second, aid donors should provide technical assistance with a comparative perspective to government policy makers on land-reform benefits and on elements of program design and administration. One consequence of the discrete and infrequent nature of land-reform programs in a particular country is that many of the countries where it is needed — whether traditional or transitional — have had little experience or knowledge of how to design or implement an effective land reform. Some of this technical assistance can also help inform broader public education programs on the economic and social benefits of land reform.

Finally, aid donors should provide financial support to land-reform programs actually being implemented, including resources for landowner compensation. Two important elements can make such assistance work most effectively. First, such resources should be identified in advance, so that a country seriously considering land reform knows what resources are available. Second, financial assistance should be given on a "progress payments" basis, so that resources are released only as land is actually redistributed to non-landowning agricultural families.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The experience of many countries has shown the potential of land reform in providing not only a source of income, security, and status, but also a foundation for broader rural development and political stability. Windows of opportunity for major land reform exist today or will exist in the early years of this century in many countries, both traditional less-developed countries and transitional economies. Large numbers of people depending on land for their livelihood still lack a secure long-term relationship to that land. The pool of households that could benefit from such reform measures numbers in the hundreds of millions. That these opportunities for reform be sought after and used is therefore one of the remaining great imperatives of democratic and equitable development.

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