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## CONFERENCE

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### AGRARIAN REFORM, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#### Summary

It is necessary to rethink the process of agrarian transformation by approaching agrarian reform as a strategic vehicle for social and sustainable development. This has implications for general agricultural and economic growth, as well as for social justice and the conception of development as an expansion of freedom.

- **Asset distribution, agrarian reform and economic growth**

Various analytical studies of the economic and historical factors of agricultural development processes have highlighted a number of important linkages that should be considered in discussions of agrarian reform:

- High levels of inequality at the beginning of a development process (for example, high concentration of land and wealth) weigh negatively on long-term economic growth. Countries with a high concentration of land achieve slower economic growth than those with a more egalitarian land structure. High levels of economic and land concentration also form a barrier to the promotion of social justice, leaving millions of people in the margins of full citizenship.
- A number of factors which are neither economic nor agricultural, such as access to health and education, also play a crucial role in the expansion of productivity in agriculture, particularly for the poorest of people. However, these factors can only be transformed into economic development if productive assets, such as land, are made available to the majority of the poorest producers.
- Agrarian reform programmes should be accompanied by measures such as poverty reduction and equity promotion policies, to support the beneficiaries in order for these reforms to have significant and sustainable results.
- Land is not only a means of production; it is also a means of gaining wealth, prestige and power. Therefore, more equitable redistribution of land would lead not only to an increase in the economic assets held by the poorest people, but also an increase in their political power and social participation.

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- **Critique of the economics-based model of agrarian growth; equity and development seen as freedom**

Important interactions exist between political and economic processes: to be successful, economic changes require the presence of strategic actors. The political dimension of these processes and the choices of development imply that what is at issue is the predominance of the agro-exporting model and agro-business interests (principal beneficiaries of this model), in view of the fact that this model obstructs fairer and more equitable development. Agrarian modernization through integration with world trade markets, usually undertaken without changes in land structure, often has certain unwanted effects: an increase in income inequality and land concentration, a decrease in competitiveness, vulnerability of family holdings, environmental degradation.

In order to make a critical analysis of this debate and of the agro-exporter agricultural growth model based on agro-business, it is important to recognize that the theme of agrarian reform is located within the fields of economic, political and social relations. Agricultural transformations have not been limited to modifications in the technical foundation of farm holdings, but have also included parallel effects in a range of other relatively autonomous social processes. These processes comprise self-assertion of the peasantry, modernizing interventions on the part of the State, rural migration, models of organization and representation of the interests of various social groups, etc. When these interests are in opposition with each other, conflict becomes an intrinsic factor of institutional change in the development process.

As well as forming a condition for sustainable development, agrarian reform is a major element of social justice and a process enabling expansion of the capacities of landless rural workers and the poorest rural people in general. In this sense, this reform is a major component of the conception of development (by Amartya Sen) as a process of which the primary means and principal outcome are the expansion of freedom.

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## *Agrarian reform, Social Justice and Sustainable Development*

*“The challenge presented at the beginning of the Twenty-first century is nothing less than changing the course of civilization, moving its axis from a logic where the means are at the service of accumulation on a short time horizon towards a logic where the objectives are linked to social well-being, to the exercise of liberty and cooperation among peoples. We need to make sure that this task becomes the most important among those to people will be focussing their attention during the next century: establishing new priorities for political action tied to a new concept of development which will be within the reach of all peoples and able to preserve the ecological balance. The spectre of underdevelopment must be neutralized. The main aim of social action would cease to be the reproduction models of consumption by opulent minorities but instead become the satisfaction of the fundamental needs of everyone, where education will be seen as the development of human potentials at the levels of ethics, aesthetics, and actions of solidarity. Human creativity, today oriented obsessively towards technical innovation, economic accumulation, and military power would be reoriented to the seeking collective wellbeing, understood as the achievement of individual potentials and communities living in solidarity”.* **Celso Furtado** (1998)

## **Introduction**

1. Despite the forecasts of its adversaries, agrarian reform has recently regained a central position in debate, in social processes, in political activities and in some government programs, presenting itself as a concrete opportunity for the social reproduction strategy of a considerable proportion of the world's peasant families and rural workers. Thus the assertion found in the masterly work of Eric Hobsbawm on the Twentieth century, according to which *"the most impressive and the most extended social change of the second half of this century, and which cuts us off forever from the past world, is the death of peasantry"* (Hobsbawm, 1995: 284) seems not to have occurred. Looking at the statistics and in particular those of developing countries<sup>1</sup>, or looking at some of the events from the agenda of the last decade, we see that this disappearance is far from confirmed. The issues around the topic of the peasantry do not necessarily express a nostalgic vision of the past but, on the contrary, contribute to a new dimensioning of the agrarian question and of its link with social transformations.

2. Various initiatives promoting the issue of the agrarian reform in these last years can be mentioned. The reinforcement of the various peasants' and rural workers' organisations and their articulation at international level, as in the successful experience of *Via Campesina*, is certainly one of the strong points of the process. Moreover, the Global Forum on Agricultural Reform (GFAR), organised at the end of 2004, has become an important reference point in the area of international discussions on access to land and natural resources<sup>2</sup>. Special sessions on the theme in the global and regional components of the World Social Forum (WSF/ FSM) have allowed the diffusion (even among movements not directly linked with agriculture) of the strategic character of the agrarian reform not only as a way to reduce poverty but especially as an instrument for social justice. In the debate of ideas there is a strong interest in once more tackling the theme of

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<sup>1</sup> We will deal with this information in the second part of the text

<sup>2</sup> The GFAR organised in Valencia, Spain, in December 2004 grouped together a significant number of organizations from more than 72 countries, many of them directly linked to movements of peasants, rural workers, quilombolas [translator's note: descendants of slaves who claim land access rights), frontier populations, indigenous nations, fishermen, forest inhabitants, extractivist populations and their representative organizations (associations, trade unions, co-operatives) whose sphere of activity is local, national and international. Thus, the Forum was transformed into a space of denunciation, of criticism, of analysis, of expression, of visibility and of proposals of a heterogeneous group of battles, policies, processes and activities whose diversity of situations, social cultures and trajectories was transformed into a strategic point for a broad discussion on the agrarian question in the Twenty-first century, in particular with regard to the process of democratization of the land. On this subject, see Garcés (2005).

agrarian reform is great, as evidenced particularly by the social changes occurring in the last 10 years and the policies - in various directions - adopted by national governments and the policies implemented by the multilateral agencies<sup>3</sup> (Borras Jr, 2006). As Medeiros (2005a:2) states with regard to this new approach to the issue: “[...the peasants] are here, they contest the public space, politicize everyday life and they try to learn the rules of politics, to change their social position and to search for ways to break with their subordinate condition. At the core of these changes there is a social utopia, which fosters the resistances and the leading role of these new actors in their refusal of the globalisation of commercial relations, drawing attention to aspects of life which don't accept seeing themselves subjected to the world market”.

3. During this time in the so-called “developing” countries, particularly in Latin America the agrarian reform issue has invariably been accompanied by powerful declarations – both pro and con – which did not always help to clarify the facts and events which illustrate the social, political and economic processes in their recent historical context (Leite, 2006). Some of these declarations analyse the distortions (in particular on the economic level) which an effective program of agrarian reform could cause to the agricultural systems of these regions. This type of criticism meshes with arguments which maintain that an equal distribution of land within these societies would be undesirable.

4. We could imagine that these arguments are justified on the basis of a heritage based on a model of agricultural modernization (technological) in vogue in the Sixties and Seventies, whose results have been strongly and justifiably criticised. As Tavares (1996: 5) writes: “according to the Latin American reformist view during the Fifties and Sixties, agrarian reform was a social process inserted in a global movement of social transformation aimed at three strategic objectives: the breaking of traditional political power (democratization), the redistribution of wealth and income (social justice) and the establishment of an internal market (industrialization). In the Brazilian case, the transformations which took place in the rural areas during the Sixties and Seventies (...) and the politico-ideological framework which become consolidated (...) have progressively led to a reductionist conception of agrarian reform re-defined (...) as an instrument of ‘land policy’. The ‘agricultural revolution’ (...) ‘has deactivated’ the traditional economic meaning of the reform (establishment of an internal market), thus contributing to a reductionist conception”. Maria da Conceição Tavares continues by recalling that the “transformations of the technical and economic bases” have not had an equivalent with respect to the other levels: “land and wealth have kept on being concentrated by the power of the new agro-industrial interests, of the expansion of the borders and of the ‘traditional interests’ (...)”. After having recalled that land “maintains (...) a considerable economic and political importance”, she concludes: “the convergence in the rural areas of the two processes – conservative modernization of production and the worsening of factors of exclusion in the traditional regions and the border areas – had tended to make the land question even more critical”.

5. The reductionist concept related by Tavares grew even stronger during the last two decades, which saw the more complex approach to transformations of the rural environment giving place to a to an argument supporting a renewed productivism, but now on new financial, technological, and institutional bases. All of this reinforcing the strong economic liberalism and export-led orientations imposed on agricultural activities as a result of adjustments in the framework of macroeconomic policy criteria.

6. It is therefore necessary to rethink the agrarian transformation process by freeing it from the reductionist moorings to which it has been subjected, by widening the horizons of possibilities and of social opportunities and (as recalled very well by Celso Furtado (1998)) by establishing agrarian reform as a strategic vector of social (and sustainable) development .

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to specific documents and individual events, there have recently been published special issues of journals dealing with these themes, such as *Land Reform, Land Settlement and Cooperatives* in 2003 and the *Journal of Agrarian Change* in 2004. University meetings at international or continental level have also characterised this period, the most recent being organised by the *Institute of Social Studies* (ISS) in January 2006.

7. The issue of agrarian reform is further promoted on the occasion of the *International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development* (ICARRD), to be held in March 2006 in Brazil, which moves us to a brief retrospection on the long period between this event and the first conference promoted by FAO in 1979. Without covering the subject exhaustively, this examination of the relationships between agrarian reform, social justice and development briefly recalls the period prior to the first FAO conference, analysing the impacts of that conference on the process of land redistribution and on the fight against poverty. A short discussion on the lessons drawn from the recent past will then be offered, keeping in mind the specificities of the various cases in the literature on this topic. This section taken together is the first point of the first section. The text then touches on the relationship between access to land and access to other natural resources and to development, recalling the repercussions of agrarian reform on economic growth, given that it is precisely the economic dimension which has given rise to the most criticism from the conservative sphere. However, the idea of thinking of democratisation of the land as a development strategy itself requires a discussion of the fight against poverty and against social injustices well beyond simple questions of growth. That discussion is the third point of this section. Finally, this section concludes with the presentation of a few statistics.

8. The second part of the study will be devoted to a critique of development models which are based on the process of agricultural modernization, continuing with a discussion of the effects of agrarian reform on sustainability of development and on the implications for a fairer society. This exercise required a clarification of what we mean by effective agrarian reform, as distinct from other instruments such as, for example, land credit. Finally, in conclusion we will suggest some institutional initiatives which can contribute to the implementation of this type of policies and foster access to natural resources by rural workers. We will refer to various historical cases to illustrate some of the issues tackled during the study. A specialized bibliography as well as various technical documents can be consulted for further information on the cases examined.

## **I. Chapter 1: On the meaning of the agrarian reform in the process of development: a rupture with the economic reductionist view.**

9. The *Action plan* defined at the time of the WCARRD<sup>4</sup> (World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development) had an underlying assumption that the transformation of rural life must be pursued by policies which allowed growth to be reached in an equitable way, through redistribution of the economic and political power and people's participation. The Conference assumed that equity would be an important factor in development and that this redistribution should not be limited to economic factors but also include political ones. In this way Stiglitz (2000) affirms that the implementation of an agrarian reform can succeed only if it is carried out within a broader framework, offering to the poorest not only access to land, but also access to credit, rural extension and other services. Which in consequence =can lead to another kind of political power redistribution, with a greater feeling of equity and of social justice and, therefore, a more positive attitude of society towards the changes necessary for development. The literature has numerous references on this which will be described later.

### **A. THE "AFTER WCARRD" (1979-2005), SOME LESSONS LEARNED AND THE PROSPECTS FOR AGRARIAN REFORM**

10. The increase in funds allocated for rural development and for agrarian reform, an important strategy of the WCARRD, collided with the economic situation of the developing countries. Although available data do indicate a rising trend in expenditures for rural development in the Third World at the beginning of the Eighties, these increases were only marginal and did not correspond to the ambitious targets of the national development plans. Moreover, in almost all these countries the share of agricultural expenditures as part of the total expenditures was lower than the share of the agricultural sector in the GDP. It should also be noted that simply increasing the sums allocated is not a sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty in rural areas. In fact it is necessary that the beneficiaries have access to the use of these resources through holding assets such as land and through favourable macroeconomic policies. Policies such as price stabilisation, protection against imported products, and the orientation of aid and taxes are needed to enable the fight against rural poverty and the viability of rural holdings. To benefit the poor however, these policies depend on their effects on employment and income.

11. If during the Eighties developing countries were affected by the economic crisis and by the structural adjustments, during the Nineties the advance of the neo-liberal hegemony would seal, even beyond the continuation of fiscal adjustment policies, the distancing of the State from the economy. According to Cox *et al.* (2003), this translated itself in the urgency of proposals such as the redistribution of lands carried out via the free market and the privatisation policies of those sectors providing assistance and support to farmers. In these circumstances, farmers, especially small ones, experienced a decrease in their access to the assistance necessary to benefit from market opportunities. In order to analyze the future prospects of the agrarian reform, the authors reviewed different lessons that could be drawn, beginning with the success/failure of the various agrarian reforms implemented during the last decades. Thus, several important factors for the success of these reforms are described: a) the presence of a strong governmental structure, accompanied by a political will and by legal security for the new landowners; b) a favourable

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<sup>4</sup> See Annex 1 for a detailed description of the follow up to WCARRD.

macroeconomic policy (interest rates, exchange rates, agricultural policy); c) technical assistance, support to the organization and financial assistance of the beneficiaries (in a non-centralized and non-bureaucratic form); d) administrative experience of the beneficiaries and the requisite infrastructure around their farm holdings; e) economic encouragements to the beneficiaries (being their own supervisors ) supporting productivity and the creation of non-agricultural enterprises; f) compensations for the ex-owners stimulating investment in other sectors; g) the creation of social capital with the involvement of the beneficiaries in the decisions concerning them; h) an effective agricultural policy (good land registration systems, land planning and taxation).

12. There are divergences between authors around some of these factors. According to Veiga (1991), the success of the Japanese agrarian reform of 1947 owed much to the payment of derisory compensations to the ex-owners. This fact was been fundamental for the expropriation of a third of the agricultural surface of Japan (in only 21 months), benefiting four million families. Thus, the new owners, mainly former tenants, were encouraged to invest in their lands. According to the author, two other important agrarian reforms which also had good results during the Fifties (those of Taiwan, province of China, and of Korea) also compensated the ex-owners at well below market values. *"In the three cases, there has been a rough confiscation of the source of land revenues and their transferral almost for free to family farmers who previously depended on the masters' will"* (Veiga, 1991:148). For these three cases it could be said that it was a particular historical situation (the issue of the cold war, for example). On the other hand, the author also mentions the payment of compensations as an obstacle to agrarian reform in Egypt, also during the Fifties, which suggests the need for a deeper discussion on the problem of compensation and of land transfer process.

13. El Ghonemy (2005:5-6), commenting on the difficulties faced in the implementation of agrarian reform during the Nineties, identifies three possibilities: unemployment in the rural areas; the transfer of lands by the small owners to speculators or to individuals living on land rent; or the abandonment of the agrarian reform policy imposed by the State in favour of a market-led land redistribution. In addition, considering that the demand for food continuously increases while the availability of arable lands continuously decreases, an important lesson drawn from WCARRD has been the need to increase public funds for land development. Thus, always according to the author, beyond the simple access to land is necessary an increase in productivity and, from a broader perspective, the improvement in the institutional structures supporting rural development.

14. Additional conditions for the success of agrarian reforms are enumerated by FAO (2001). First, the technological improvement of agriculture will not be obtained through techniques based on the intensive use of capital because many small farmers would not possess this capital to implement them. In addition, a development strategy of this nature does not create jobs, thus negatively affecting the demand for products from the non-agricultural sector. Additionally, the inputs for capital intensive agriculture are mainly imported from other areas, while the consumption model of those farmers who have such large capital is oriented towards high value, luxury goods which are not produced locally. The demand (intermediate and final) of agriculture is thus satisfied outside the area. On the other hand, the strategy of agricultural growth based on labour-intensive techniques gives small farmers access to these techniques, thus supporting the poorest rural workers and producers, thus arranging nicely the sequences of final and intermediate demand within the local non-agricultural sector.

15. Sarris (2001) as well draws up a panorama based on the historical experiences of different countries which have undertaken this non-capital intensive path. In Japan, contrary to other countries, from the beginning of the century the technological

development of agriculture has led to an increase in the productivity of the workforce, leading to increased incomes for individual farmers and subsequent encouragement to setting up of small rural enterprises. In India, agricultural development based on employment within 20 years cut in half the poverty of this country. The increasing agricultural demand fostered the setting up of small scale, labour-intensive rural enterprises producing non-agricultural goods which benefited from the availability of an abundant and under-employed workforce. A similar process took place in China, first through technological improvements, then through reform of the land tenure system (transformation of collective ownerships into a system of small family ownerships, through what has been called the "responsibility system" created more production support) and finally, through the improvement in rural infrastructure and education (Amin, 2005). The increasing revenues of farmers were reinvested in goods produced by local labour – intensive rural industries. The result is that the country passed from 250 millions of extremely poor people in 1978, to 125 millions in 1985 and to 100 millions during the Nineties (Mellor, 2001)<sup>5</sup>.

16. Taking into account the lessons that Latin America could draw from the experience of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) of the European Union, Saraceno (2001) underlines the need to consider rural development not only in its sectoral dimension (agricultural), but also in combination with a territorial approach which takes into account the emergence of non-agricultural rural activities. The author maintains that policies based on this approach, with local actors participating in the discussion of regional priorities leads to development less dependent on aid and which produces a greater long-term dynamism. Local family enterprises - not necessarily agricultural - create the conditions for such endogenous development, with greater job creation and new entrepreneurial initiatives<sup>6</sup>.

## **B. REDISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS, AGRARIAN REFORM AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

17. Anand and Kanbur (1998) propose an analysis based on land redistribution, which they relate with redistribution of income, finding that the initial inequality constitutes a limiting factor for further growth. In this research, only 2 of the 15 developing countries with a Gini index of land redistribution superior to 0.7 showed an increase in wealth greater than 2.5 percent per annum between 1960 and 1992. In order to explain this phenomenon, the authors explain that the limited availability of credit for the poorest (who have nothing to offer as collateral) weakens investment and reduces school attendance. The redistribution of land assets can lead to greater access to information by farmers as well as to new production investment opportunities. Kuznets' theory (1955), which is based on data restricted to only three countries (the United States of America, England and Germany), would see its assumptions rejected both in developing countries and in developed ones.

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<sup>5</sup> Mellor (2001) also reviews a series of examples on the effects of agricultural growth in different economies. Analyzing the case of Taiwan (province of China), he notes that agricultural growth there had three main impacts on the overall economy: the reduction of poverty; the creation of funds available for industrialization; the creation of demand for the outputs of small enterprises which, supplying agriculture in the beginning, gradually, supplied cities and finally turned towards foreign countries. Even today the majority of Taiwanese exports are produced by small enterprises (with under 50 employees) spread around the country. The Taiwanese case represents also an example with regard to the way in which the non-agricultural rural activities can catalyse this process (Fei, Ranis and Kuo, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, see the work by FAO (2004) which also contains a proposal for the negotiation of policies in a territorial dimension, Veiga (2001) and De Janvry and Sadoulet (2000).

18. Sarris (2001) similarly claims that land redistribution, as well as the guarantee and clear specification of property rights, allows farmers make greater investments in their farms, such as technical improvements leading that can lead to an increase property value. Access to land capital by landless workers could equally make possible other gains in effectiveness, such as the use of various under-exploited productive resources (for example, one's own family workforce) and the reduction in the exploitation cost of the so-called factors of production (for example, the use of family work without supervision or transaction costs). Moreover Stiglitz (2000) stresses that, in well-managed agrarian reforms, the role of land redistribution in development is reflected not only in the improvement, pure and simple, of cost effectiveness, but also in the redistribution of the political power. These reforms would induce greater popular participation in the elaboration of public policies and also within local institutions, improving the outcomes of the development-oriented policies. In the same direction, Leite (2000) suggests that land redistribution can support an "apprenticeship in organization" for farmers, coming from both their experience in the fight for land and from actions organised in the creation of new productive units. Within this framework it should also be noted that the formation of co-operatives and producers' associations can contribute to an intensification of the local demand processes.

19. Using the same data base as Deininger and Squire (1996); Birdsall and Londono (1997) looking at 43 countries calculated that significant initial levels of inequality (strong concentration of land and of capital for example) were a negative influence on long-term economic growth. Comparing East Asian countries with Latin America showed that during the Seventies and Eighties the economic growth of Latin American countries was barely 20 percent that of the Asian countries, a difference ascribe broadly to differences in the initial distribution of assets within a country. The authors propose that if the Latin American economies had had the same distribution of assets as that of the East Asian countries in 1960 that Latin America would not now have only half of the poor that are present today. According to Khan and Muqtada (1997) in relation to the growth of production in the period 1971-1992 the elasticity of employment reached 0.5 in Asia, whereas in Latin America the result was - 0.5, indicating an even greater concentration of income in Latin American.

20. Benabou (1997) also looked at the proposals of Kuznets through an empirical study of 13 countries during the Nineties. He found that inequality has a negative influence on growth, creating economic instability and leading to a reduction of both savings and investment by the most vulnerable groups. A better distribution of income would lead to an increase in the consumption markets, permitting the establishment of a larger scale industrial sector with consequent positive effect on growth. This conclusion was confirmed by the empirical test carried out by Anand and Kanbur (1998). In the same line of reasoning, Guanziroli (1998) inventoried several works which demonstrated, with some a few rare exceptions, the inexistence of economies of scale in agriculture. This supports the hypothesis that concentration of land does not increase production (and consequently economic growth) through effects of scale. Mazoyer and Roudart (2002) stress this same point. Although only large landowners actually own large capacity farm equipment, small farmers nonetheless can have access to such equipment through the rental market and by communal purchase (Binswanger, Deininger and Feder, 1995). In addition, the employment of many workers by large agricultural enterprises has supervision and production management costs which in agriculture (contrary to in industry) are high. By comparison, the costs of supervision are non-existent in the case of

family-run agriculture since the workers share the benefits without incurring hiring and recruitment costs<sup>7</sup>.

21. Looking at the effect on economic growth of asset redistribution for poverty reduction, several approaches can be pointed out. According to Sarris (2001), the incidence of extreme poverty in a rural population can create "poverty traps" where the need to maintain emergency savings in the form of easily sold goods (such as stocks of food or jewels) to deal with possible misfortunes can lead the poorest to avoid what would be more actively productive investments such as wells, irrigation equipment since these would be more difficult to liquidate in a crisis. Thus investments by the poorest may not be as productive as they could be due to the need for these "emergency reserves". Unexpected shocks can also lead farm heads to withdraw their children from school so that they can work on the farm, thus reducing the potential level of the rural workforce's qualifications. A redistribution of wealth which shook off these vulnerabilities by creating guarantees for the poorest in case of crisis should yield good economic dividends.

22. The reduction of poverty and the promotion of social justice along with better nutritional conditions for rural families also means greater economic growth according to the analysis of Arcand (2000). There is a strong statistically proven linkage between improvements in nutritional status and economic growth, apparently through increases in labour productivity. Arcand indicates that the impact on growth of the populations improving nutritional status is felt principally at those periods where relative (seasonal) malnutrition is most severe, leading to the conclusion that a decrease in the amount of extreme poverty could yield very good economic returns.

23. Lipton (2001) affirms that there is a complementarity between several factors such as access to health, education and nutrition. Having these conditions united is a determining factor for an increase in agricultural productivity, especially of the poorest. These factors should therefore be taken more into consideration in both the discussion and the implementation of public budget priorities, with consequent beneficial effects on productivity. These factors can be transformed into economic development however only if the productive assets, such as land, are available to these producers, enabling them to transform their first conquests (education, nutrition, health) into development.

### **C. BEYOND THE ECONOMIC GROWTH: POVERTY REDUCTION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST INEQUALITIES**

24. In a study on Latin America De Janvry and Sadoulet (1999) found that economic growth can reduce rural and urban poverty only if the initial levels of inequality and of poverty are not too high. In the countries where there is a strong inequality from the start, growth is completely ineffective in reducing poverty and inequality. In cities, the rate of schooling needs to be high in order for growth to reduce poverty. Yet another condition for growth to reduce poverty/inequality is the absence of periods of economic recession. In fact, the analysis of the authors shows that one year of economic depression more than undoes the effects of one year of economic growth. As seen earlier, another important factor is the redistribution of capital assets among the poorest, and

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<sup>7</sup> According to Binswanger, Deininger and Feder (1995), in any particular country, the prevalence of large landholdings is possible only because of public policies supporting these properties through aid and instruments which allow them a better insertion into the market. Such distortions caused by inappropriate State intervention lead to poverty, to economic stagnation and to the establishment of an agricultural economy characterized by reduced productivity.

the availability of equal opportunities of access the public and private institutions. Differentiated growth of the service sector is also a key element in avoiding increases in rural and urban poverty.

25. Turning the analysis around, the same authors (2001) point out the importance of wealth redistribution, affirming that poverty in rural areas in Latin America carries with it an underemployment of economic resources. If there were a more equitable distribution of assets in the rural environment it would be easier to get fuller returns from labour and lands. The same can be said about restraining some of the other problems that negatively influence growth, such as excessive rural migration, political instability and environmental deterioration. The authors (2002) also maintain that in the last thirty years more than 75 percent of the poverty reduction which occurred in rural areas of Latin America was simply because the poor migrated away, and not because of increases in agricultural revenue. Which of course does nothing but move poverty and the poor towards the great urban centres where basically the same problems are recreated in a different context.

26. An important factor for the success of agrarian reform is the linkage between land distribution and enabling policies which ensure the competitiveness of the new beneficiaries; this was not the policy environment in the majority of the cases in Latin America. In the Peruvian and Bolivian reforms, for example, beneficiaries did not have the benefit of such policies while in Mexico there was even a reduction in public investments. In Chile, the lack of access to credit led a part of the beneficiaries to sell their lands. An important lesson to be drawn is the need to adopt rural and regional development policies which encourage (or at the very least do not inhibit) non-agricultural activities of the *assentamentos* in the rural areas.

27. The importance of the instrument of expropriation should be noted in relation to the non-achievement of the "social function of land"<sup>8</sup>, especially when there is a large concentration of underemployed lands as well as a large concentration of landless individuals. De Janvry and Sadoulet maintain that incomplete agrarian reforms which did not fully guarantee the property rights of beneficiaries partially compromised the development of their new land holdings by in effect blocking access to credit and thus investment. This aspect is also underlined by Borras Jr., Kay and Lodhi (2005), who carried out an enormous analysis on different national case studies. They show that the results of agrarian reforms which are not accompanied by supporting for the beneficiaries can reduce or even cancel the effects of poverty reduction and equity promotion policies. For Janvry and Sadoulet (2005), land access is fundamental for economic development, for poverty reduction and also for a sustainable environment. Land is not simply a factor of production, but also a factor of richness, of prestige and of power. In this perspective its redistribution entails not only an increase in economic assets held by the poorest but also an increase in their political power and social participation. Since that land is a natural asset, land redistribution also influences the protection of the environment<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>The achievement of the social function of land, according to the legislation in force in some countries, consists in the recognition of economic (productivity), social (as for example granting of workers' rights to employees) and environmental requirements.

<sup>9</sup> Activities directed towards the protection of the environment are also underlined insofar as farmers carry out services such reforestation, soil conservation and water distribution. However, support must be created for carrying out these actions whose costs are concentrated but whose benefits are extended to external economic agents. Other factors are quoted by Janvry and Sadoulet (2002), such as the existence of "emergency funds" which protect families from the risks linked with economic activities. An example is the Rural Social Security in Brazil (Delgado and Cardoso, 2000). However, according to Moyo (2005), it should be mentioned that the entry into force of these programs, when they are employed as substitutes of agrarian reform - and not as *complementary* measures - do not modify the framework of the land tenure system and thus reduce the effects of the social and economic development process, as has occurred in some cases in southern Africa.

28. Those favourable towards the implementation of agrarian programs have renewed their arguments, indicating the transforming potential of democratizing rural areas whether through improvement in the citizenship function of a large part of society which today is still marginalized, or by means of an increase in employment and rural income, or by the dynamization of geographical areas, etc.

29. the issues related to employment, to production and to income are not necessarily associated with the fight against poverty. As we saw however, economic growth (considered here as the increase in production and/or of income, and consequently of employment) does not necessarily guarantee development (economic, social, sustainable, etc.), even if a certain amount of growth is necessary in order for development to take place. At the present time, given the small number of Asian and Latin-American cases examined, it is not possible to affirm that they are extremely poor countries (especially when they are compared with other countries in a much more vulnerable situation) even if within these nations there are areas where poverty and misery (rural and urban) reign with impunity. Nonetheless, supported by a vast arsenal of statistics on a wide range of sectors, we can categorically affirm that Brazil, for example, is indeed a deeply unjust country where the economic concentration indexes (of income, land, production, etc.) are extremely high. In this sense "*agribusiness*" model has deepened this inequality since its growth vector is accompanied by a strong concentration process (of land credit, space, etc.) as well as by a brutal occupation of the preservation areas of native communities (small producers, Indians, gathering/ extracting populations, etc.) due to the expansion of monocultures (Leite, 2006). We will discuss this again later.

30. As shown by a series of specialized studies on the effects and local changes brought on by the creation of rural *assentamentos* (agrarian reform projects) or by the regularisation of land ownership by previously threatened peasants or workers threatened, these new structures of production and living will little by little give rise to transformations of the economic, political, and social order touching on the affected populations and encompassing other actors and local institutions. According to Heredia *et al.* (2005), Leite *et al.* (2004) and Medeiros and Deere (2005), the Brazilian agrarian reform created positive effects at municipal level, such as the diversification of agricultural production, the expansion of the labour market and the political strengthening of beneficiaries whose claims for physical and social infrastructure cannot easily be ignored. As soon as they receive a plot of land families start accessing other types of benefits such as credits for the construction of houses and crop planting, with add-on demand effects for the rest of the economy. Another important result of the agrarian reform process has been the establishment of dialogue between the authorities and social sectors which had never been listened to before, thus modifying the traditional patronage relations which dominate the Brazilian rural environment (see Appendix 2).

31. In the context of the cooling of the job market in the economic situation of various developing countries (and as well as in "developed" countries), the *assentamentos* represent an important employment alternative. According to Leite *et al.* (2004) and Medeiros and Leite (2004), in addition to creating on average three jobs in each family farm (within the farm itself, and excluding activities developed off-farm) these agrarian reform projects also create employment opportunities for external people. Indeed, this type of labour recruitment has been found in the 36 percent of the farms analysed in the research.

32. Comparing past and present situations of the families settled and bearing in mind the great heterogeneity of the *assentamentos* and the precariousness of the infrastructure of many of them, once can still easily note an improvement in their living conditions. This leads sometimes to the emergence of zones which have a considerable number of *assentamentos* and their families. In practice, some *reformed areas* take shape, counterbalancing the logic of isolated expropriations which has usually characterized state interventions in the land question. This in itself is an

important effect of the transformations which the *assentamentos* have brought to the region, the concentration of beneficiaries dynamising the above-mentioned changes.

33. The argument which we have developed here, supported by authors with different affiliations, contrasts with the residual and compensatory dimension in which the conservative thought - in the best of cases - confines the topic of land access. However, in spite of the optimistic considerations of the previous paragraphs, it is undeniable that a greater effort must be made to tackle the problem in a structural way. The data which follow do not leave any doubt on this subject.

#### D. CONCENTRATION OF INCOME, OF LAND AND THE NEED FOR AGRARIAN REFORM

34. Today half the world's population lives in poverty, with less than US\$2 per day. The areas with the deepest levels of poverty are South-West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, which together include virtually all of the 50 poorest countries (cf. Picture 1), and where there is also a serious shortage of drinking water. According to the Population Reference Bureau, Washington (2005), in Africa the rate of infant mortality is 15 times higher than in developed countries. According to UNCTAD (2002), in the 49 poorest countries of the world the number of people in situations of extreme poverty (with an income of less than US\$1 per day) has doubled during the last 30 years, reaching two-thirds of the population of these countries. Up until 2015 this figure will increase even more, being estimated to reach 113 millions, and compromising the achievement of the Millennium Development goals.

35. In the poorest countries in Africa - which includes 34 of the 49 poorest countries in the world - almost 9 people out of 10 live on less than US\$2 per day, consuming on average US\$0.86 per day, whereas in the United States this figure rises, *per capita*, to US\$41 per day. UNCTAD data also indicates that in these 34 African countries, from the second half of the Seventies until the second half of the Nineties, the proportion of people earning less than US\$1 per day has increased from 56 percent to 65 percent.

PICTURE 1



Source: UNCTAD

36. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in its 2005 Annual report, since 1990 in Latin America and in the Caribbean the number of poor people has increased by three millions - reaching 96 millions - in an area which suffers also from strong income concentration.

37. Poverty particularly affects populations living in rural areas where, according to FAO (2002), 3,233 millions of people are to be found, 2.881 millions of whom are concentrated in the countries considered as "developing" (Garcés, 2005). For a more precise idea of the dimension of this problem, we can see in the ECLAC data presented by Chonchol (2005), the dramatic character of the situation in Latin America (cf. Table 1). The author stresses that, in addition to the drastic and absolute reduction in the number of people (from 122 millions in 1980 to 111 millions in 1997), poverty generally most heavily affects the indigenous rural communities (corresponding to 30 percent of the total number of poor living in rural areas) and the small producers who subsist in the arid or semi-arid regions of the area (also 30 percent).

**Table 1: Poor and extremely poor population in rural areas - Latin America (%)**

| Country  | Rural population in situation of poverty<br>(% compared to the total rural population) | Rural population in situation of extreme poverty<br>(% compared to the total rural population) |
|----------|--|--|
| Brazil   | 75.5   | 36.5   |
| Chile    | 57.1   | 32.6   |
| Colombia | 66.6   |  |

**América do Sul  
Amostra de países**



people – which is 18 million more than in the Nineties. Of this total 815 million live in developing countries.

39. Similarly, one can say that for a significant number of countries land continues to be an asset with highly concentrated ownership, as can be seen by looking at the data from the 1990 World Agricultural Census undertaken by FAO. By combining data of several countries one can develop a framework of the land redistribution in different continents.<sup>11</sup>

| Size of farm holdings | Number of farm holdings | Total surface of farm holdings (ha) | Farm holdings (% of total) | Surface (% of total) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Up to 5 ha            | 4 516 479               | 8 187 796                           | 46.04                      | 1.26                 |
| From 5 to 10 ha       | 1 363 464               | 9 506 212                           | 13.90                      | 1.46                 |
| From 10 to 20 ha      | 1 233 671               | 16 829 281                          | 12.57                      | 2.59                 |
| From 20 to 50 ha      | 1 260 591               | 38 916 505                          | 12.85                      | 6.00                 |
| More than 50 ha       | 1 436 348               | 575 517 440                         | 14.64                      | 88.68                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>9 810 553</b>        | <b>648 957 234</b>                  | <b>100.00</b>              | <b>100.00</b>        |

**Source:** *World agricultural census of 1990 - FAO. Data processing by the authors.*

40. In South America the countries which have provided comparable data are: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru. On the map above (Picture 2) we can see that these countries (coloured in black) cover a significant proportion of the continent. In Table 2, we can also note that almost half (46.04 percent) of the farm holdings occupy 1.26 percent of the total farm area, while 14.64 percent of the landowners possess 88 percent of the farmland. If we exclude Peru from the sample (for which the data on farms over 50 ha are different), we see that only 1.03 percent of the landowners no less than 52.13 percent of the farmland.

41. In Asia case only a few countries with a significant territory have presented comparable data: India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand. In the chart below (cf. Figure 3) one can see that these countries (coloured in black) do not account for a preponderant majority of the surface of this continent. From this sample of countries however, we can see that there is also a concentration of land, although not as marked as in South America. In this sample of Asian countries, 58.17 percent (corresponding to the smallest farm holdings) possess 14.27 percent of the farmlands while a mere 1.67 percent (corresponding to the largest farms) account for 18.66 percent of the farmland (cf. Table 3)

<sup>11</sup> Many countries have not revealed their data on land redistribution and some have communicated it differently, which prevents combining data from different countries and hampers the construction of an overall framework. For the same reason we do not present here the African situation as there was limited information available. The possibility of including other countries in the two areas considered, as well as being able to calculate results for Africa, would probably render the framework even more dramatic. The situation is even more complicated for the Agricultural Census of 2000 where the availability of information which could be technically comparable between the various countries is even worse.

Figure 3



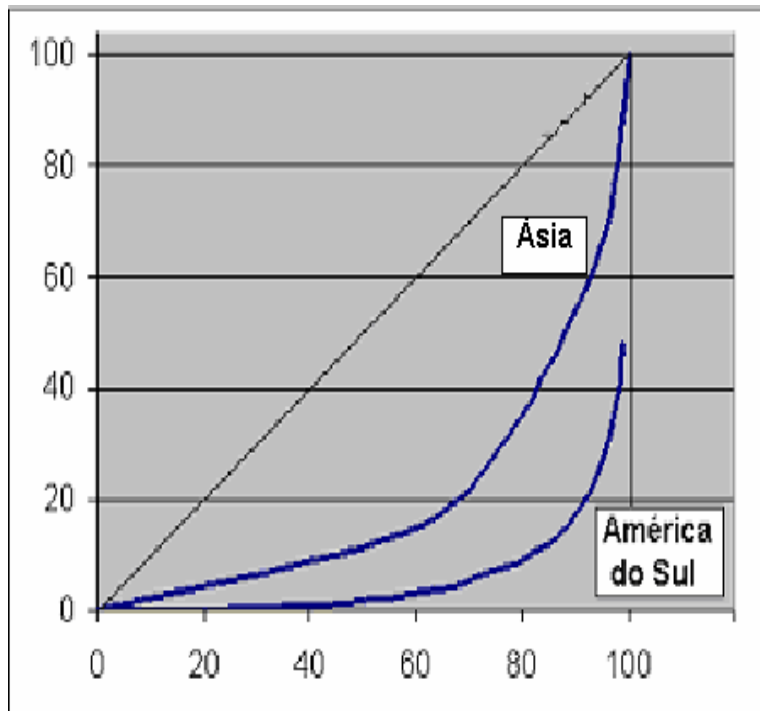
Table 3: Land tenure system of Asia (India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand)

| Size of farm holdings | Number of farm holdings | Total surface of farm holdings (ha) | Farm holdings (% of total) | Surface ( % of total) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Up to 1 ha            | 79 825 714              | 31 277 888                          | 58.24                      | 14.17                 |
| From 1 to 2 ha        | 25 712 552              | 36 249 122                          | 18.76                      | 16.42                 |
| From 2 to 5 ha        | 22 793 615              | 68 664 834                          | 16.63                      | 31.10                 |
| From 5 to 10 ha       | 6 453 688               | 43 406 296                          | 4.71                       | 19.66                 |
| More than 10 ha       | 2 283 690               | 41 205 604                          | 1.67                       | 18.66                 |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>137 069 259</b>      | <b>220 803 744</b>                  | <b>100.00</b>              | <b>100.00</b>         |

Source: World agricultural census of 1990 - FAO. Data processing by the authors.

42. Graph 1 below presents the Lorenz curve for the two continental areas mentioned above. Note that (for the sample of countries examined in each area) there is strong concentration of land ownership in both, concentration being stronger in the case of Latin American.

*Graph 1: Lorenz curve– Asia and South America – Concentration of land ownership*



**Source:** *World agricultural census of 1990 - FAO. Data processing by the authors.*

43. We have seen earlier that countries with a high concentration of land ownership exhibited serious difficulties with economic growth. It is important to remember that these high levels of economic and land concentration are obstacles to the promotion of social justice, leaving millions of people marginalised from full citizenship. Viewed from this perspective, agrarian reform is undoubtedly one of the policy mechanisms which can offer a high degree of coverage at a relatively low cost which can help to correct the situation.

## **II. Chapter 2: Justice, equity and social homogeneity: agrarian reform as a strategic vector for sustainable development.**

44. As rightly pointed out by Hirschman (1994) on the subject of the interaction (“*on and off process*”) between political and the economic processes, such changes require the presence of key stakeholders in order to be successful, while the paths followed by each of the two processes do not necessarily show an adaptively functional behaviour. Which is to say that even if an agrarian reform process is the target of a strong counter reaction, the reform can still have a successful outcome, in gaining autonomy from the underlying assumptions which gave rise to it, in the redistribution of assets, in beginning to develop, in the broad sense of the term, in a sustainable way. In the same sense, it is fundamental that, together the implementation of the process of redistribution, there be a serious questioning of the development model which has marked the path of the developing countries for the last 30/50 years. In effect, it is a matter of questioning the priority given to the agro-exportation model (with or without industrialization) and the interests of the major groups which set it up and which prevent a more just and equitable development of these nations. The topic is the theme of the present section.

### **A. IN FAVOUR OF A CRITIQUE OF AGRICULTURAL MODERNIZATION AND OF ITS OBSTACLES TO AGRARIAN REFORM**

45. The vast studies devoted to the changes occurred during these last decades in the rural areas of Latin-America (and, in a certain manner, in the rural areas of developing countries) pay particular attention, and not without reason, to what is called *the modernization of agriculture*. In fact, and contrary to the forecasts of analysts in the Fifties and Sixties, the agricultural sector from the end of the Sixties has absorbed increasing quantities of agricultural credit. The sector has incorporated the “modern inputs” into its production process through highly technological factors and mechanizing production and by integrating itself into the modern marketing channels. The resulting growth in productivity has led to an increase in the production of raw materials and of foodstuffs for both exportation and the internal market. Even the production of foodstuffs destined to supply cities, in spite of the difficulties linked with the orientations of economic policy, has been, according to some serious studies, “quite satisfactory”. The modification of the technical base of agriculture, combined with its articulation with the industry manufacturing agricultural inputs and machinery as well as with the industry processing agricultural products has led to the formation of what is called “the agro-industrial complex” or “*agribusiness*” or to “the industrialization of agriculture” (Palmeira and Leite, 1998).

46. According to economists, this kind of modernization, which took place without modification in the land ownership structure, has had some “perverse effects”: land ownership became more concentrated; disparities of income grew; rural migration was accentuated; the rate of exploitation of the labour force in agricultural activities increased; recourse to one’s own labour force in the smallest properties also increased; the quality of life of the rural labour force declined; the environmental conditions degenerated .

47. By a curious paradox, while these "perverse effects" have led the rural workers' organizations to intensify their fight for access to land, as seen in the cases of Brazil, of Zimbabwe, and more recently of Bolivia (among others) – the link between the lack of land and degradation of the living conditions has become more obvious than ever in the eyes of their leaders. In the intellectual sphere, these effects have led to the questioning of the relevance of an effective agrarian reform, giving way even by the end of the Eighties to a market friendly land policy as underlined by authors such as Barraclough (2001), Cox *et al.* (2003) and Kay (1998), among others. This line of argument had already been developed, given the international perspective. Jacoby (1980: 296-7), in an article symptomatically entitled "*Has Land reform become obsolete?*", commenting on the agrarian reforms implemented more or less everywhere in the world during the three post-war decades, declared: "*Land reform as a slogan was thus to be heard everywhere; but except under revolutionary conditions actual land reform programmes were never thoroughly implemented. The evolutionary type of land reform, in fact, showed a unique tendency to wither away and add disappointment to the existing misery*". And he continued: "*It is true that feudalism and semi-feudalism is on the retreat in the rural areas of Southeast Asia and Latin America. But this is certainly not caused by changes in the agrarian structure through land reform but merely by the advance of technology, by the penetration of money transactions into the rural areas and, above all, by the development of a new form of capitalism which is based on the many-sided activities of transnational corporations*".

48. If we put aside Jacoby's term "*evolutionary*" few of the authors who in one way or another have examined the agrarian reform disagree with the idea presented. The question which can still separate them (and it is difficult to tell to what degree this divergence is really related to discussions or to political positions, the idea defended by some of a "*deideologized agrarian reform*" [Binswanger and Deininger, 1997; De Janvry and Sadoulet, 2002] corresponding itself to a staked out position) is to know whether the modernization of agriculture has excluded all types of agrarian reform from the agenda, or only certain types of reform.

49. The complexity of this debate – clearly evident in the increasing number of interventions in various fora, in the growing number of problems being tackled and in the widening of the debate to go beyond the sphere of competence of economists and rural sociologists – indicates that there is increasing social recognition of the issue. This complexity also alerts us against any temptation to treat the subject exhaustively here. The attempt at sketching out an analysis which we give here however does to us sufficient to see if there is some kind of consensus among this multiplicity of opinions.

50. In an almost perfect inversion of the situation, of refusal to recognise the changes noted by Hirschman (1971: 352-3) concerning the Latin American intellectuals at the turning point of the Sixties and Seventies<sup>12</sup>, what we find in the pieces of this debate is the unanimous recognition of the modernization of agriculture and of its (according to some) - inevitable -, "perverse effects"<sup>13</sup>. The logical consequence is to assert the obsolescence of the "agrarian reform of the Fifties and Sixties". This kind of reform was suited for another type of economy: an economy founded on the

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<sup>12</sup> Hirschman interpreted this refusal (using Leon Festinger's concept of "cognitive dissonance") as an attempt to reduce the unease caused by evidence that would oppose previous beliefs through their suppression and thus the confirmation of the former cognitive scheme.

<sup>13</sup> On the "perverse effects", it is interesting to relate what Hirschman (1996: 651) says more recently "*in my work I use a lot this concept of unexpected consequences, especially in the analysis of possible changes. This includes struggling against the incorrect use of this concept by some people who change it into the argument of "perverse effects" and affirm that the attempt to carry forward certain reform policies produces effects which are exactly opposite. I feel that this type of argumentation is really treason with respect to the idea of "unexpected consequences" because it cancels the "open endedness", or the openness to various solutions that the concept itself introduces, and substitutes for it predictions and fear*".

"rural system" or on the "*latifundia-minifúndia* system". It was suitable in countries like Brazil or perhaps India, at a moment when there was an internal market of a certain size, where industrialization was still insufficient, where the agrarian structure was an "obstacle" and the agrarian reform constituted a prerequisite for economic development. But it ceased to be suitable from the moment a consolidated internal market was created and agriculture itself was "industrialized". The debate which then results consists in determining if, in the era of "*the agribusiness*", agrarian reform still makes "economic sense". Those who answer positively, will, as we saw earlier, pull out list economic advantages of reform: employment, distribution of income, a different technological model and, in order not to completely cut the bridges with the past, food production. Those who answer negatively but still recognize a certain virtues in reform will try to identify in it some social advantages whose importance could justify the dimensions which reform would have to take<sup>14</sup>.

51. In a paradoxical way, in doing this, at the same time while one is denying any current applicability of the "model of agrarian reform of the Sixties and Seventies" its relevance and the paradigms on which it was based in the past are confirmed. Essentially, a certain model of economic development and agrarian structure has been validated in order to guide the transformations in the rural areas towards agricultural modernization. How was such modernization possible? Or, how could an inadequate model remain valid as a basis to reflect on the phenomena that took place during this period and, what is more, to develop its counterpoint (the model of the *agribusiness*)? That remains a "mystery".

52. In reality the analysis of these social transformations of the rural environment is found beyond the changes in the technical base farm holdings and even beyond the debate on the effectiveness and efficiency of agricultural production. Authors like Chonchol (2005) and Palmeira and Leite (1998) draw the attention to the fact that agricultural transformations were not limited simply to modifications of the technical basis of farming, carry on in parallel the effects of a complex of other relatively autonomous social processes. These processes are the political assertion of the peasants, the assertion of the modernizing intervention of the State in the rural sector, rural migration, the organization and representation of the interests of various social actors (in particular in Brazil, the catholic Church and the non-governmental organizations directly implicated), and over a more recent period, the emergence of the *assentamentos*. Highlighting these processes suggests that can be categorised into two relatively autonomous and contradictory movements. On the one side, the progressive loss of legitimacy of the traditional forms of domination - associated with the incapacity of the State (a State which is not only referee, but participates in the social battles) to manage new forms of legitimacy, has led to the multiplication of both the number and extent of conflicts (Amin, 2005). These conflicts are not only over the land, over production, or over working conditions, but also over public works, over official support in disaster situations, over the environment, over the setting of agricultural prices, over foreign trade negotiations, over technology, over medical care, etc. They are not mere conflicts involving peasants and

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<sup>14</sup> In this sense, it is interesting to note that authors like Kay (1998: 28), in spite of his criticisms concerning the path which the topic had taken during the Nineties, in particular in the Latin-American case, decreased their expectations regarding the setting up of a more effective program of reform (*state-led agrarian and/or radical reform*). According to the author: "*the era of radical agrarian reforms, however, is over. Despite the continuing arguments by scholars and activists in favour of agrarian reform [...] as well as the recent upsurge in ethnic and peasant movements for land redistribution in the region, there has been a shift from State led and interventionist agrarian reform programmes to market-oriented land policies. Paradoxically, such land policies have been much driven from above by the State and international agencies. Thus future State interventions in the land tenure system are likely to be confined to a land policy that focuses not on expropriation but on progressive land tax, land settlement, colonization, land transfer and financing mechanisms, land markets, registration, and titling and secure property rights*". The same author seems to "regain hope" in more recent articles (Borras Jr, Kay and Lodhi, 2005).

big estate owners anymore, and even less conflicts that can resolve themselves. Furthermore the advantages assured by the State in the framework its modernization policy have attracted into the agricultural and in the agro-industrial activities (but especially in land speculation) capital from the most diverse sources, creating a coalition of rent seeking interests around businesses linked to the land, this coalition being encrusted within the very machinery of the State itself. Paradoxically, modernization has caused an increase in the political influence landowners, both *modern and traditional*.

53. It is thus in this realm of economic, political and social relations that the topic of the agrarian reform inserts itself. A discussion which identifies the current challenges of the problem cannot ignore this context, running the risk on the one hand of neglecting a meticulous examination the opportunities - and of their obstacles - which are again beginning to open out for land democratization and, on the other hand, of not understanding potential range of action of the social movements which demand social justice. Those who already in the Eighties had decreed the obsolescence of agrarian reform and the death of peasantry have failed because they did not take into consideration the successful and increasing manifestations of the different peasants and rural workers' organisations in the fight for access to land and natural resources. In the same way it is necessary to go beyond a strictly agrarian analysis, in the strict sense of the terms, so that such arenas can be evaluated from a perspective which shows the limits imposed by the more general process of development (macro-economic or the agricultural sector) along with the challenges which must be faced.

## **B. THE MEANING OF AGRARIAN REFORM IN A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE**

54. In the sense supported here, agrarian reform should be understood not only as a policy of for the distribution of land (*land reform*), but also as a more general process (*agrarian reform*) incorporating access to natural resources (land, water, vegetation in the case of extraction workers, etc.), to finances, to technology, to goods and labour markets and in particular to the distribution of the political power<sup>15</sup>. In addition to access, which implies a displacement of populations towards the lands obtained with the reform, it is important to highlight that in the case of native communities (indigenous, *quilombolas*, fishermen and coastal populations, shepherds and extractivists, among others) it is the regularization of the rights of use and of property rights of areas already occupied which is at stake. In this sense it is a question of guaranteeing the social reproduction of these families which are invariably found in situations of vulnerability. Nonetheless, as with any distribution policy, setting up an effective agrarian reform implies action by the State: the expropriation of rural estates which do not achieve their social function. This measure explicitly opposes winners and losers and thus generates conflicts. This conflict must be understood here as an intrinsic element of the process of development, as already expounded by Hirschman (1996) with his thesis regarding "disequilibrium" as feature of social change. Denial of this conflict explains recent unfortunate attempts to implement policies of land access through *market-assisted land reform*. These attempts are supported by an illusory asepsis according to which at the level of the market these contradictions could be eliminated. This illusion has led

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<sup>15</sup> In the terminology of Barraclough (2001), this not only implies thinking about *land tenure systems (land tenure)*, but also about the functioning of the agrarian system as a whole, a position which, according to the author, had been the object of FAO's intervention.

institutions such as the World Bank to finance experiments of this kind in countries such as South Africa, Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala<sup>16</sup>.

55. In this sense, Polanyi has recently been updated by the economic literature (in spite of his contributions over more than 50 years) to explain that the concept of *market* itself is the result of a process of social construction. This movement of positions of the idea of economic process, including here the market dimension, becomes obvious as a social and institutional process. The logical aspect of these processes refers not only to the means used and to the expected ends, but also precisely to the relation between them, transcending their formal sense and their respective attempts to apply them to social reality. According to the author, the understanding of this shift of positions of the economic process, liable to diverse appropriations, requires appropriate institutional analysis. The tools used by Polanyi (1976: 168 *et seq.*) to carry out such an analysis with the forms of trade, with the uses of money, and with elements of the market. Given that they function as particular characteristics of the social process, money and land, for example, require a specific regulation and cannot be subjected to what is called the free market forces (Polanyi, 2000). Thus the setting up of a land market depends on an action by the State, whether guaranteeing property rights (private, collective, etc.), or by direct intervention to assert the social function of this property. Obviously, situations will vary intensely through time and space and it's not our role here to carry out here an exhaustive analysis of these cases. Nevertheless, we have understood that such policies require for their implementation a strong capacity by social movements to exert pressure, especially when we consider the recent Latin-American and African experience (Heredia *and al.*, 2005; Llambí, 2005; Moyo, 2004 and 2005) (Heredia *et al.*, 2005; Llambí, 2005, Moyo, 2004 and 2005)<sup>17</sup>.

56. The role of the markets in the redistribution of land assets among various groups and social classes as well as sectors of the national economies is a topic common to a diversified group of agrarian reform experiences that has been treated by Borras Jr, Kay and Lodhi (2005) and on which we have previously commented. Three thematic axes in their comparative analysis stand out: the role of the State in the distribution of land directed towards the fight against poverty, the action of the peasant movements and the struggle for land, and finally, the interaction between State and society in the implementation of this process. On this basis the authors constructed a certain conceptual typology of agrarian reform policies<sup>18</sup>: (1) those which are oriented by the market (*market led*)<sup>19</sup>, whose axis is determined by the gains in economic effectiveness and productivity; (2) those which are developed by the State (*State-led*), usually related to the preservation of political legitimacy; (3) those which are let loose by the peasants (*peasant-led*), in which the predominant idea is that the State is the guardian of the interests of the elites; (4) a policy based on a vision of synergy between State and society (*State/society-driven*),

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<sup>16</sup> Today there is a broad range of strongly critical works with regard to the market-assisted land reform practice of the World Bank. For a detailed and geographically complete vision of the subject, see the anthology organized by Ghimire (2005) and the article by Pereira (2005).

<sup>17</sup> As Borras Jr, Kay and Lodhi (2005: 7) affirm regarding the lessons learned from the various reforms: "*most of the land reforms, but especially the capitalist-oriented ones, while they involved significant degree of state initiative and intervention, had also witnessed the significant roles played by non-state actors – peasant movements and their allies. These issues bring us to the question of policy and political strategies of carrying out land reform, a topic that occupies an important portion of the current discourse on land policies*".

<sup>18</sup> Moyo (2004) also presents a comparative framework of southern Africa. According to the author, while a *redistributive* policy was followed in Zimbabwe, in Namibia and partially in South Africa and in Mozambique, the *regularization of property* was emphasized in Swaziland, in Botswana, in Zambia and partially in Mozambique. Malawi and Lesotho experienced different processes (a transitory process in the first case, support to migration in the second). In the same context the author highlights the various forces which have motivated implementation of these programs and the role of the State in each of them. For the Latin American case see Barraclough (2001).

<sup>19</sup> As is known, this view is adopted by the World Bank as reference point for its actions. Pereira (2005: 8) appropriately recalls that, because of the confrontations of the Bank with peasant organizations, and in particular with the Global Campaign for agrarian reform and *Via Campesina*, the term *market-assisted land reform* was little by little replaced by more "acceptable" expressions such as "solidarity", "negotiated", and "community based" agrarian reform.

neither romancing over "the omnipotence" of peasants and of their organizations nor relying too much on the centralized command of the State. Even with the aim of validating comparative methodological parameters for the cases studied, this differentiation suggested above by Borrás Jr *et al.* (2005: 21), offers interesting paths for thinking about the directions of agrarian reform in the context of development strategies, given that perhaps, as stressed by Amin (2005), the democratic principle must prevail in the institutional arrangements through which agrarian reform is implemented. According to the author, *"the correct answer to the challenge of managing a land system not based on private property (at least not in a dominant way) goes through the reform of the State and its active involvement in the implementation of a system of access to the soil which is modernized, economically effective, democratic (to avoid, or at least to reduce, inequalities). The solution is absolutely not a 'return to custom', which is in any case impossible, and which would not accomplish anything except to exacerbate the inequalities and to open the way to raw capitalism.*

57. Thus to tackle rural development it must be conceived as something which extrapolates agricultural growth and increases in productivity, approaching what Veiga (1998, 2002) calls "distributive efficacy". However, the Latin-American experience, and that of Brazil after the war, showed that such a terminology did not keep a direct link with the practice of anti-poverty measures and the fight against injustice. Quite the contrary, on various occasions rural development policy was called on to counterbalance the policy of agrarian reform (as in the *Land Statute* in Brazil in 1964), and not to complement it as one could have expected. This set up a difference between the two terms, agrarian reform and rural development, which leads us to reaffirm our recommendation that the implementation of agrarian reform must be a strategic priority in a redefined rural development policy (or equally in the case of territorial development), where even the "negotiated dimension" of the process can remain temporarily suspended given the prominence of the land conflicts, as we have stressed before.

58. As is known, especially from the beginning from the Nineties, the "sustainability" dimension of the development process has come to the fore, including in particular environmental questions. It is not our task here to digress more on this topic, but to the extent that (as sustained by Barraclough (2001) and Shiva (2002)) access to land and water are fundamental human rights, concerns regarding the protection of natural resources must be intrinsically linked with the land question.

59. Although our study concentrates on the distribution of land assets, the question of access to water or forest resources is not less important. In the first case, it is necessary to mention the international experience of the fishermen's movement, set within a scenario where trade liberalization had led to accentuated concentration of the global fishing resources, with 80 percent of the production to an extremely reduced number of international consortiums led by the Spanish group Pescanova (Avedaño, 2005). Another example which deserves special attention, particularly now when programs to fight desertification are beginning to be supported, concerns the survival process of populations living in arid or semi-arid areas.

60. By replacing the practice of "fight against drought" with the idea of "cohabitation with the semi-arid", an important network of social movements and NGOs (the Articulation of the semi-arid-ASA), created in the Brazilian Nordeste in 2000, has little by little developed a creative approach to the construction of water cisterns in rural environments in this area (see Annex 3). In this case, the study of the evolution of the implementation of a public policy which is not necessarily governmental demonstrates a break with the patronage systems for the distribution of water in tank trucks belonging to the local elite (cf. Leite, 2005).

61. Thus, whether it be the land dimension or that associated with water resources which is underlined, both guaranteed and actual access to the latter resources must be included in a sustainable development vision, although we maintain that this should *not* lead to a prevalence of the environmental dimension over the social one, much less the hiding of conflicts underlying the

adoption of conservation practices. According to Barraclough (2001a: 1) "*sustainable development is a term conveying different and often contradictory meanings for the diverse groups promoting it. Its recent popularity stems in part from its ambiguity. The underlying concerns it embraces about the limits to economic growth imposed by the earth's non-expandable ecosystem, and by social conflicts associated with growing inequalities and inequities, are ancient ones*". By believing that the existence of various approaches is an inevitable characteristic of this subject, the author proposes surrounding contradictions should be recognised, which then confers on the State a strategic role in setting up the process of sustainable development.

62. Nonetheless, institutional initiatives on this subject, including those of multilateral agencies, have been characterised more by a semantic change of their own practices (from rural to sustainable, for example) rather than necessarily by modification of their actual posture or of the mechanisms used, though there have been some real advances noted in the latest period.

63. In the context of the argument just presented, a critical approach to the model of agricultural modernization - beginning with the arguments related to sustainability - also implies a challenge to the interests which feed the rapid territorial expansion of export-oriented monocultures, as in the production of soy beans in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. The above mentioned model has profited by advancing towards areas of indigenous communities and native forests, and by expelling the small farmers from these areas, in Brazil the surface being planted with soy beans increasing at 14 percent per annum between 2000 and 2004, whereas the remainder of the production shows a negative annual change 1.3 percent.

### **C. JUSTICE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL ASSOCIATION AS THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPING AGRARIAN REFORM**

64. According to Vázquez (1986: 661) "*... the use of the expression social justice concerns the need for equitable distribution of wealth, for a fair labour remuneration, for the fight against unemployment, for the distribution of private property and social insurance (social security, social coverage)*". Authors such as Furtado (1992) and Sen (2000, 2002) addressed the subject by linking it to the full development concept. For the Brazilian economist, "*[...] theories of development are explanatory diagrams of social processes where the assimilation of new techniques and the consequent increase in productivity lead to the improvement in the wellbeing of population with an increasing social homogeneity [...]* The concept of social homogenisation [which is equivalent to that of equity] does not refer to the standardization of lifestyles, but rather to members of a society broadly satisfying their requirements in food, clothing, dwelling, access to education, leisure and a minimum of cultural goods" (Furtado, 1992: 6).

65. Generally, we can associate the program of agrarian reform, in particular the *assentamento* of rural landless workers, with an increase in the level of decision-making (autonomy) of these new social actors and therefore, in Sen's terminology (2000), with the growth of their *human abilities*, the growth of their *human capacities*, especially including (or, to quote Castel [2001], *affiliating*) a considerable segment of a poor and marginalized population who mainly live in rural areas<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> According to Sen, poverty is understood as deprivation of the basic capacities and not only as we usually see it, by (low) income levels. In this direction "*what the perspective of capacity provokes in poverty analysis is an improvement in the understanding of the nature and causes of poverty and of deprivation through redirecting the focus from the means (and of a specific mean which generally receives exclusive attention, i.e., income) towards the aims sought by people and, correspondingly, towards the freedom to be able to reach these aims.*" (Sen, 2000: 112).

66. Especially when we compare the 'before and after' living conditions of these settled families (beneficiaries), the concept of *freedom*, as a prerogative for the development process suggested by Amartya Sen, has an important repercussion, as measured by the value which the *assentados* themselves attribute to their situation following their access to land. Invariably this situation is compared to their former conditions of slavery or semi-slavery, as is frequently found in numerous cases in Brazil (Heredia *et al.*, 2005; Leite *et al.* 2004), as well as in the South African context (Bernstein, 2004; Moyo, 2004, 2005a) or in rural areas of Bolivia (Kay and Urioste, 2005). The development, the definition and the implementation of the socio-economic strategies by the families in the agrarian reform programme demand as a prerequisite for taking such decisions the existence of a certain freedom or liberty to choose. This has direct repercussions on the possibilities for development (rural, sustainable, local, regional, etc.) that were based on the agriculture/family production context or, more specifically, of family-run agriculture as both the object and the result of a unique social and economic process (Chayanov, 1966). Which is to say, the process coming out of the fight for land and the setting up of the *assentamentos* for rural workers.

67. As affirmed by the authors in the case of Brazil, "*beyond economic issues, new social actors are created and the dignity of a historically excluded population is reconquered. Testimonials about the meaning of being a settler were common, especially in the areas in which single crops and the power relations that come with them had been predominant. Not having to pay a lease on the land, feeling like they had been freed, lords of their own steps and capable of controlling their own lives, ceasing to be slaves, were recurring elements in the settlers testimonials when they compared their past and present. As much as the present is pregnant with difficulties, in many cases access to land provoked breaks with the past and a clear sensation of improvement*" (Heredia *et al.*, 2005).

68. Thus, "*the expansion of freedom is seen as the principal end and the principal means of development. Development consists in the elimination of deprivations of liberty that limit people's choices and opportunities to exercise in a balanced way their condition as an agent. [...] is what makes up development*" (Sen, 2000: 10). Sen's contribution, even if characterised by a series of limitations, such as the excessively individualistic view which confers on the agent/individual rather generic characteristics dissociated from the social, political and economic environment (and the conflicts) in which he/she fits, is nonetheless useful in this moment of creation of *assentamento* projects and the development of new social reproduction strategies by the families which have benefited from the land distribution.

69. In order for the process to progress it is fundamental to ensure *a priori* access to the necessary means, not only for the living conditions of these families, but also for production and employment. The concept underlined here concerning the *access* (but also the *guarantee* when the public concerned is that of communities demanding property regularisation), is also linked to what Sen indicated as instrumental dimensions of freedom, tied "*to the way in which various types of rights, opportunities and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general and, thus, to the promotion of development*" (Sen, 2000: 54). For this to happen, access to the goods and conditions which permit a worthwhile life, as well as access to the policies and mechanisms which contribute to the development of productive activities is an essential condition for thinking out the reproduction plans of the settled families. The author explicitly mentions agrarian reform as a measure which effectively increases human capacity and gives autonomy to these individuals (Sen, 2000: 296).

70. In the same way, De Janvry and Sadoulet (2001, 2002) insist on the idea that land distribution acts directly on the promotion of social justice, particularly owing to the following factors: a) land becomes an effective instrument to accumulate wealth and to transfer this wealth to the next generation; b) land can become a guarantee to access credit; c) land ownership is a source of personal and social security at the time of old age (land can be sold, rented or mortgaged to face crises or changes during life); d) land ownership ensures the continuity of access to the

same plot (offering the possibility of capitalization of long-term investments) and a source of local social capital; e) land ownership confers a social status and negotiating power. We could add, drawing from Carter (2003), that there is a direct impact on the food security of the beneficiary families even when it does not necessarily translate itself in an increase of monetary income, but rather through an increase in the self-sufficiency of the beneficiaries. Moreover, the same author draws the attention on the fact that one of the important critiques of the land credit program (*market-assisted land reform*) of the World Bank is based on the social justice perspective. According to Carter (2003), the fact that the beneficiaries of the program must buy lands to (re)-establish their production in rural areas, might signify historical justice if were not for the consideration that, most probably, the same beneficiaries have been expelled or dispossessed of the land on which they previously worked and produced.

71. It should be underlined that the agrarian reform question is gradually being used as a concrete measure in the direction of gender equality in the rural environment, although this process advances at a very slow speed and faces resistance not only from outside but also sometimes from inside the access to land movements. Deere (2003) and Moyo (2004, 2005), outline the legislative innovations contributing to the recognition of women's rights to access land and its derived instruments (legal, financial, etc.) in South Africa, Brazil, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Rodríguez (2005) takes up the gender question of South America, in particular concerning indigenous populations in their struggle for land in the region, drawing particular attention to the issues of seed production and to the area of technology and knowledge, seen as a workers' right<sup>21</sup>. Similarly to Rodríguez, Moyo (2005) takes up in an appropriate way the ethnic question with regard to its relationship with the land question, studying the recent experience of Zimbabwe which has allowed, little by little, an actual transfer of land assets to the black population.

72. In this way, taking into account the specificities of the cases (in particular with regard to historical, political and cultural dimensions), we think it possible to state that land access represents the conquest of an autonomy by the beneficiary families, with direct repercussions on the promotion of citizenship and the reduction of social injustices. In line with the views presented by Castel (2001), this phenomenon allows the recomposition of a social fabric which in the majority of the cases had been mangled by the presence of colonizers, economic elites, predatory technological modernization, etc.

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<sup>21</sup> Or, as recalled by Amin (2005): "*the question of the relationships between men and the women constitutes an equally essential dimension of the democratic challenge. Those who say "family farm" (peasant) obviously refer to family, which is so far and almost everywhere characterized by structures imposing women's submission and overexploitation of their labour force. Under these conditions the democratic transformation will not happen, not without organized movements of the women concerned*".

## Conclusion and recommendations

“In conclusion, land reform policies in southern Africa seem to be evolving through the interactive use of market and compulsory approaches to land acquisition for redistribution, restitution and tenure reform to both the landless and an emerging black agrarian bourgeoisie. Official land reform policies are increasingly being forced to respond to growing popular demands for land. An important lesson to be learnt from the political independence settlements in the settler territories of the sub-region is that, by not sufficiently addressing the problem of inequitable land and natural resources ownership, the downstream entrenchment of unequal racial economic opportunities, ensuing from such control in economies facing slow employment growth, are likely to fuel agitation for radical land reform. Thus, land redistribution, restitution and tenure reform in redressing historical grievances, social justice and poverty are crucial ingredients of reconciliation and development, and essential to the resolution of the national question and democratization processes”. **Sam Moyo** (2005).

73. This document has tackled the relations between agrarian reform and the processes of economic growth and development, of sustainability and of social justice. By relying mainly on a bibliography specialized on the theme we have aimed to present the evidence allowing us to verify a positive causality between the distribution of land assets and economic growth, at least within particular circumstances. Although the experience with agrarian reform and with the fight for access to land have wide variations in time and space, and take place in an equally wide range of economic, political, social and cultural contexts, this article has tried to show that the achievements of agrarian reforms must be understood within a broader development perspective (social, sustainable, etc.). Thus it is advisable to consider the importance of variables such as the conquest of autonomy by the beneficiary families, the improvement in living conditions (in spite of the precariousness observed), the recognition of the rights of diverse group of stakeholders with respect to land and natural resources and finally, the presence of women in this scenario.

74. Going beyond the rapid assessment of the evolution of the subject since the first FAO conference (WCARRD), the argumentation developed here has supported the thesis that in order to discuss such questions the issue of the agrarian reform needs to be considered from outside of the reductionist trap in which it has been confined, differentiating agrarian reform clearly from the process of agricultural modernization as well as from the policies which sought to substitute the expropriation of land with credits for the purchase of land. Such revaluation requires re-examining the role of the State in agrarian reform, similar to the re-examination with respect to the promotion of sustainable development, and to consider the organization of social movements and their capacity of representation and of alliance in pressuring the public sector for a more effective intervention in land democratization.

75. As one might expect, however, the fight for access to land access and for the establishment, whether partial or total, of policies for land distribution is invariably accompanied by a lot of political conflicts, the constitutive element of these processes. In many cases the situation leads to a dramatic number of violent incidents such as assassinations, death threats, expulsions of workers and slavery-like living conditions. The testimonies collected by researchers as well as the outcomes resulting from the research reported here indicate that, even beyond its effects on the development process, agrarian reform can be an important (and cheap) instrument to deal with such situations.

76. The assessment of the actions put in place by governments in the post- WCARRD period (from 1979) shows that this initiative has performed worse than expected, the situation still being characterised by high concentrations of economic, land and political power. The strengthening of the democratic process should have generated a better distribution of assets, which without any doubt is the point the demands and mobilizations of the various social movements for which this issue is at the core of their agenda. However, and by way of recommendation, it would be

interesting if FAO could develop in a more daring way the proposal for the setting up of an international institutional mechanism for monitoring the achievements of agrarian reform and rural development. Such a mechanism should however be both more inclusive and more specific to particular contexts than were the mechanisms set up to monitor achievement of the WCARRD objectives. Thus the process to follow up on the next conference (ICARRD in 2006) will be as important as or even more so than the conference itself. In contrast to the situation during the economic recession of the Eighties, the present process is taking place, in spite of the economic crisis, in the context of a more proactive attitude being taken by the different social actors, in particular those directly related to the land question (as seen, for example, in the case of South America).

77. Thus, the proposal of an international follow-up mechanism under the direction of FAO, with regional and even sub-regional segments which include at the base representation of the various stakeholders, in particular movements and their organizations, but also of governmental sectors, development agencies and NGOs could be a good opportunity for FAO to regain the central role which it played in this field in the rather distant past. This could also allow the elaboration (and use in the case of already existing data) of specific indicators (recipient population, dispossessed lands, distribution of income and assets, ability to access food and water, respect of peasants' rights, recognition of the gender condition, reduction of rural violence, achievement of the objectives, legislation, etc.) a kind of HDI for the agrarian sector which would allow monitoring and comparison between different situations, permitting a visualization of the promises kept by governments in this area.

78. We would like to end our contribution with a quotation taken from the work by Sólón Barraclough, which mirrors our own opinion on both the character and the current strategic importance of agrarian reform as well as serving as posthumous homage to this researcher whose studies have been fundamental for the understanding of land, food and environmentally related questions in today's world. Barraclough (2001) says that *"certain analysts have concluded that the increasing globalisation of finances, trade, information, production and modern technology has rendered redistributive agrarian reform unfit for today's developing countries. Significant social differentiations have already developed within the rural populations of these countries and it would be impossible to redistribute land rights in such that most of the poor rural populations could benefit. The difficulties encountered in the Chilean and Peruvian in reaching a consensus among the principal beneficiaries on the division of expropriated lands in the Chilean and Peruvian cases seem to support this conclusion. These analysts think that the rural poor will have to wait until other livelihood strategies become available through other activities. By that time some of them could be helped through a market environment assisted by agrarian reforms which would voluntarily support the sale of land from big landowners to low income buyers, the latter being able to use it in a more effective way. The majority of the poor who would not be able to profit from this kind of transaction could be helped by social safety nets and emergency aid until they find other sources of income.[...] Luckily this pessimistic vision is not universally shared. Redistributive agrarian reform can still play a crucial role in the fight against rural poverty as well as in the promotion of a broad-based sustainable development. The increase in social differentiation, along with other aspects of globalisation offers as many new possibilities as it does obstacles for important reform. Disagreements among the big landowners over the costs and benefits of reform are growing. Peasants have new possibilities to communicate and to organize themselves thanks to access to modern transport and the ease of communication. Today they are in a better position than in the past to find allies among environmentalists, human rights groups and other civil society groups, as well as within international organizations devoted to the promotion of an equitable and environmentally sustainable development. People-based developments strategies which include radical agrarian reforms have not have necessarily become obsolete. The problem is to organize social forces capable of and having the will to support them"*.

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