

Summary of the document set of themes # 2

Success in the struggle to reduce hunger and poverty around the world requires an understanding of the actual causes of the current, unacceptable situation; causes which are linked to the competition developing in global agricultural markets between different levels of production. Entire social groups and millions of producers are losing the access to land and natural resources that provide their livelihoods, and rural production systems are being irreversibly destroyed on a large scale. Because these systems have historically proven to be the most appropriate to meet human food requirements and to preserve natural resources, it is imperative to put a stop to this process. This economic, social and ecological crisis is a threat to peace and to the survival of humanity, and finding solutions to this crisis will be a major challenge in years to come.

The document identifies the main capacities of States and civil society that need to be strengthened, and that are necessary for sustainable rural development. Currently, neither States nor international organizations have proven capable of introducing effective policies to halt this trend of reduced access to land and natural resources. They have not been effective in encouraging processes to put a stop to growing inequality. Because a general discussion will not facilitate any progress in this debate, the document lists and briefly analyses central issues relevant to forming a precise understanding of the requirements for new capacities. Redistributive agrarian reform processes are more necessary than ever, but for these processes particular policy conditions are necessary. As these policy conditions are often transient, it is important to know how to profit from them when they occur. Meanwhile, however, it is possible to intervene in other ways, by opposing illegal appropriations, regulating land markets, and guaranteeing producers' usage rights rather than only landowners' rights. Nowadays it is necessary to implement policies that facilitate the evolution of agrarian structures with the aim of rendering them more compatible with majority interests. However, civil rights of future generations and alternatives to current dilemmas are built from basics, through the struggles of producers' and rural people's organizations, supported by the development of civil society. These organizations have always played an essential role in the establishment of new legal frameworks and new policies. With the acceleration of the historical process, these organizations also need to strengthen their capacities to become more effective.

Analysis of the performance of new forms of government shows clearly that neither States nor Civil Society will be able to face the challenges of the twenty-first century alone. On the basis of an analysis of the relationship between States and Civil Society and advanced levels of communication between these two poles, the document develops a conceptual framework for new forms of regulation and governance in the pursuit of sustainable and equitable rural development. Further essential building bricks of this development process are territorial dialogue, vertical dialogue between different levels, active subsidiarity and “autonomy versus responsibility”. From this it is possible to propose a preliminary outline of actions and programmes to strengthen the capacities of the actors involved, with a view to establishing new forms of governance. These proposals include the establishment of an Observatory which would be responsible at a global level for the development of training processes related to good governance in rural areas; the creation of mechanisms encouraging States to implement suitable policies and to hold themselves accountable to them; and the strengthening of rural and peasants’ organizations.

The document ends with a question: for such proposals to be applied, is it not necessary to challenge certain dominant ideas, to tackle the roots of the poverty question by correcting the devastating effects of the global market, to give up the myth of absolute ownership of land so as to invent new forms of territorial governance, and to give up the illusion of a perfect market for land and natural resources? There is a need for pluralistic solutions to these challenges, within the increasingly broad dynamics of alliances that must extend beyond the rural environment.