



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

For 75% of the world's poor who live in rural areas, secure land tenure or access to land is vital to escaping poverty. Land reform that provides this security and improves land distribution disparity has proven to profoundly affect the poverty rate. Methods of land reform can be understood within three general categories: government-directed reform, popular social mobilization, and market-based reform. However, despite the many benefits of secure land access, the application of effective land reform has proven difficult and rare. In light of this, private nonprofits and coalitions are essential to the research and application of effective land reform methods. This paper seeks to contextualize one example of private reform, Agros International, within an understanding of the global and historical scope of land reform methods.

Land reform methods are applied primarily to three general population categories: rural tenant farmers or agricultural workers who do not own the land they work, rural farmers occupying collective farms in former communist nations, and rural people occupying public or traditionally occupied land. The most critical regions today are those less developed countries with high levels of rural poverty, predominantly in Latin America and Africa.

Historically, government-directed reform has dominated the conversation and context of land reform. The category is characterized as change managed by national governments through institutional reform in policy or law. Methods used are diverse, including imposed redistributive reform (taking land from large landowners and giving it to the landless), land tenure reform (improving the land tenure system and its stability), and land restitution (using legal processes to restore land rights). These methods have been successful in several Asian nations but have failed in regions of North Africa, the Near East, and Latin America. They are criticized for politicization, bureaucratic heaviness, and an inability to reach the rural poor.

Often government efforts are begun due to pressure from social mobilization. Some popular movements seek to reform the land system using coalitions, advocacy, public demonstration and research as tools to persuade governments to act. Others, refusing to work within the system, use land occupation, collective governing, and declarations of autonomy to achieve their land-related objectives. The landless poor and indigenous groups utilize social



organization and mobilization to find voice in a system of power and politics that does not provide for their needs. These movements are vital to maintaining land reform as a key element in the national and international response to poverty and development.

Due to the failure of many government-managed efforts, the focus of international development agencies and many nations has shifted in the last two decades to methods that combine civil society, markets, and government. These market-led programs currently dominate the horizon of preferred methods. A combined loan/grant program is administered by national governments with support from international agencies to allow rural poor to acquire land through market availability. This method avoids the political and bureaucratic inefficiencies of other methods, but is criticized for its inability to address entrenched inequity of power, wealth and land distribution.

Private nonprofit organizations have stepped in to the field of land reform to fill gaps left by governments and social movements. One of these, Agros International, addresses rural poverty in Latin America through private market-based land reform established on a foundation of community planning and holistic development support. Agros acts as a facilitator to meet the inadequacies of simply allowing the market to dictate the process of land reform. They mediate land purchase, provide loans for land ownership and infrastructure, support the development and training needed to establish economically sustainable farming communities, and facilitate processes of community planning that prepare communities to become self-managing and self-sufficient. The Agros model reveals weaknesses of traditional methods, offers practical solutions, and provides insight that can be carefully applied elsewhere.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In a world where the presence of rural poverty calls for immediate response, addressing relationships between the poor and the land is one of the most essential elements in affecting poverty relief. Secure access to land is regarded as one of the most effective ways to provide rural populations with the tools to sustainably improve their quality of life. The need for such reform is critical as 45% of the world's people continues to make their living primarily from

agriculture (Prosterman and Hanstad, 2003) and 75% of the world's poor are living in rural communities (International Land Coalition, 2003). For these populations, land reform that successfully provides secure access to land is vital to escaping poverty.

This paper will survey the three categories of land reform methods, all of which are used to increase secure land access for the rural poor in response to historic patterns of inequitable land distribution. The relationship between equal distribution of land ownership and rural poverty is striking. Research by El-Ghomeny (2003) demonstrates that a one-third decrease in the inequality of the land distribution index reduces the poverty level by one-half in 12-14 years. This is the same level of poverty reduction that could be obtained by agricultural growth sustained at 3% over a period of 60 years. These statistics, and similar findings by Deininger and Squire (1998) and Alesina and Rodrik (1994) which connect inequality with negative effects on growth, make land reform with a goal of equitable distribution a crucial focus of global poverty relief.

Secure access to land contributes to poverty reduction in myriad ways. El-Ghomeny (2003) cites the importance of control over food-intake as a contributing factor in the reduction of malnutrition and the development of other aspects of human quality of life. Benefits of improving land tenure stability as identified by Prosterman and Hanstad (2003) include increased agricultural production and overall economic activity, facilitation of democracy by shifting dominant power relations, and reduction of political instability by reducing tensions of land ownership relations. Deininger et. al. (2003) recognize the productive and environmental benefits of the increased investment in land that are stimulated by secure land tenure.

Despite the many benefits of secure land access, the application of effective land reform has proven difficult and rare. To some extent it is simply neglected as an essential aspect of poverty relief. Primary reasons for this neglect are varied. Land ownership, as an issue more underlying and subtle than violent or conspicuous manifestations of poverty, receives less media attention than disease, hunger or natural disaster. It is a politically controversial issue, addressing the heart of power and wealth relations of a country, often threatening individual interests and causing violent tensions. Furthermore, the complexity of reforming a system that requires and



causes economic, agricultural, migratory, political, legal, and cultural shifts has left a history of unsuccessful efforts that leave it outside the scope of policymakers' development options (Prosterman and Hanstad, 2003).

In light of the lack of adequate or effective land reform on the public international scale, private nonprofits and coalitions are a vital part of the horizon of land reform as they facilitate and stimulate secure access to land. Agros International is one such organization. An examination of their work in light of the three dominant methods of land reform reveals a practical model that is similar in structure to market-led land reform. The Agros method bypasses the inefficiency that makes many methods ineffective yet maintains the beneficiary support that ensures sustained success. This report seeks to contextualize the Agros model within an improved understanding of the global context of land reform.

## **CONTEXT**

When speaking of land reform methods, one immediately discovers a variety and complexity of historical and present cases that make categorization difficult. The complexity of land reform is due in part to the various populations to whom the term applies. Prosterman and Hanstad (2003) recognize three general contexts in which land reform can be understood. The first is rural households in less developed countries, generally tenant farmers or agricultural workers, who do not own the land they cultivate. This category includes approximately 100 million families worldwide, making up a major part of the agricultural population in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, South Africa, Brazil, Columbia, Guatemala, and Honduras. Successful reform, resulting in individual family farm ownership for this population, has been implemented in Mexico, Finland, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bolivia, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and India (West Bengal and Kerala). The second group is made of rural households in former communist nations who live on state or collective farms and are experiencing a "Second Generation" of land reform. This is estimated to include 130 million households. The third group is rural households occupying public lands or indigenous groups without title to their land, including approximately 25 million households. Although land reform occurs worldwide, the

most critical regions today are those less developed countries with high levels of rural poverty. Especially prominent in the discussion and evaluation of land reform are the countries of Latin America and Africa. Case studies from these regions feature prominently in this paper.

All of these populations are affected by application of the three dominant methods of land reform: government-directed land reform, popular social mobilization, and market-led agrarian reform. Historically, government-directed reform has dominated the conversation and context of land reform, receiving the attention of academics and international organizations alike. The mid-century success of such imposed land reforms in several Asian countries provides the prototype for the potential of this method to affect enduring change. However, similarly structured reforms in Latin America, the Near East and North Africa have been characterized as failures. In all cases government-managed reform can never be fully separated from social pressures. Popular social mobilizations (of one form or another) have been and often are the catalyst that forces governments to initiate changes in land systems. Often this social demonstration responds to the failure of government plans to adequately meet the needs of the rural landless poor. In light of the criticized government redistribution reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, the response of international development agencies and many governments has shifted in the last two decade to methods that combine civil society, markets, and government. These market-led programs, piloted in several countries with support from World Bank, currently dominate the horizon of preferred methods. The success of the new trend is currently being analyzed and recommendations surfacing as programs are evaluated.

## **GOVERNMENT-DIRECTED LAND REFORM**

It is difficult to clearly delineate the realm of land reform characterized as “government-directed” due to its wide range of goals and methods. In general, it is change managed by national governments through institutional reform in policy or law. Throughout history this method has had diverse objectives. At times it has been used as a means of poverty relief for rural peasants or farmers. It has been part of an overarching plan to increase agricultural productivity and efficiency in order to buoy up country exports and manage natural resources (Moyo, 2000). It

has been used as a tool of political pacification of rural unrest and to alleviate the growing density of developing areas. During certain eras it has served as a tool of industrialization, modernization and urbanization. Idealistically it is a tool of justice, increasing equity of wealth distribution. Government land reform projects often represent more than one of these objectives.

Methods used by governments to enact land reform are many and varied. The traditional method of land reform is the imposed redistributive reform. These reforms provide land ownership to tenant farmers or agricultural laborers by dividing large holdings of private landlords into small and medium plots. Although enacted prior, redistributive policies dominated the political agenda of land reform in the 1950s in Asia and the Near East and in the 1960s in Latin America (Ciamarra 2004). The role of the state in these reforms was developed by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and World Bank. After this period, land redistribution reforms greatly diminished and the state role was reduced.<sup>1</sup> Governments do continue to enact land tenure reform, land restitution, and other strategies (as well as participation in market-led reforms as described below). Land tenure reform includes the development of techniques and institutions that make land tenure work more efficiently, effectively and fairly. This includes development of legal support and land system information, establishment of property rights through legal reform and land registration, and land leasing as a means to increase productivity of land. Currently there is a focus from bilateral donors to support the development of modern land tenure legislation, cadastres and land registries. This is considered a necessary process to facilitate success in other methods of reform (especially in market-led reform) (Riddell, 1997). Land restitution is a legal approach to restore violated land rights through the presentation of claims to a court system. Further methods of land reform implemented by governments include the recognition and protection of communal

---

<sup>1</sup> A noteworthy present-day re-emergence of government enforced land redistribution is occurring in Venezuela and Bolivia. Currently both governments are pursuing land reform in support of peasants and indigenous populations that redistributes privately held land into communal farms. This combination of government movement with social mobilization of the poor and marginalized to produce communal farms is a method that harkens back to socialist reforms. Their long-term success has yet to be tested (Burbach, Carroll and San Felipe, 2006).

ownership of land based on customary tenure systems, as well as settlement or resettlement programs on public lands (International Land Coalition, 2003).

The success of government-led land reforms is generally debated. Land redistribution reforms in the mid-century in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea are considered ideal success stories of government managed land reform. Common aspects in Taiwan and Japan contributing to their success are the previous existence of land tenure data, effective bureaucratic systems, and strong governmental enforcement. In the case of Korea, support for local administration and agricultural development were largely responsible for the effectiveness of the reform. In the three cases the reforms encompassed all aspects of the agrarian system and were strongly enforced by the government. In comparison, similar efforts to enact land redistribution reforms in Latin America, the Near East and North Africa have been highly criticized for their lack of success (Riddell, 1997). In Latin America many of the reforms are often considered to have been politically motivated to mitigate rural unrest and establish the power of the ruling government. These governments also showed an inability or unwillingness to provide the necessary services, inputs and institutional developments necessary to make redistribution programs effective. Inefficient bureaucratic systems further contributed to the inability to enforce reforms.

The disparity of the success of land reforms in these decades is also attributed to the difference in land tenure systems where reform was attempted. Where land was organized in the landlord estate system, property rights are simply transferred from the estate owner to the tenants who actually farm the land, making the change straightforward and producing stable systems of production due to its logistic simplicity. Since WWII this transfer has successfully occurred in Bolivia, China, Eastern India, Ethiopia, Iran, Korea, Japan and Taiwan (Deininger et. al., 2003, Binswanger, 1993). In regions organized by the hacienda system, where tenants have only their small house plots and farm the large home farm of the landowner, the success of land reform is highly debated. These reforms proved more complex due to the necessity to actually redistribute the land itself, rather than just its ownership, leading often to the eviction of tenants and the concentration of large farm estates (Binswanger, 1993). This has been the case in much of Latin America, Asia and South Africa where land reforms have had minimal impact and

remained incomplete because of political resistance and the institutional preference for large landholdings (Deininger et al., 2003, Binswanger, 1993).

Government-led land reform is further criticized for the bureaucratic process on which it depends. In the case of land restitution, this makes the process of rights-restoration very slow and limits access to groups who can provide the necessary documentation to present their claims in a legal setting (Moyo, 2000). Although government-led land reform usually recognizes rights of the rural poor to land and aims to increase just relationships, it does not often succeed in shifting inequitable power relationships. Land is generally concentrated in the hand of the politically and socially powerful; therefore, attempts to redistribute their source of secure wealth, regardless of the rate of compensation given, meet with great resistance. As Flores observes, “land reforms are revolutionary, last-resort measures, like deep surgery...there is a wide gap between the promulgation of laws and their meaningful application” (1970, 896). Because the processes are top-down, application of local information is limited and power is maintained in the hands of those who already have wealth and influence (Deininger et. al., 2003).

## **LAND REFORM THROUGH POPULAR SOCIAL MOBILIZATION**

Land reform driven by popular movements is a bottom-up, rights-based approach to land redistribution. It is dependent upon the social organization and mobilization of communities victimized by the actual land tenure realities of their local region. These social movements are grounded on concepts of justice that give legitimacy to land claims. Often these claims are based on historic land use or occupation, the right to economic stability, the need for land-use efficiency, and historically inequitable land distribution. These claims protest actual government policies, social hierarchies, and economic practices.

Because mobilizing groups protest the status quo, present-day popular movement land reform often manifests as a general or specific protest against mainstream neoliberal policies that often shape land relationships and reform. Harris (2002) characterizes two types of reformers who protest neoliberal policies. The first are those who desire to reform capitalist globalization



to make it more humanitarian. The second are the “radicals” who reject the system of capitalist globalization and propose new social orders, generally oriented toward socialism.

The first group, the system-reformers, is represented by such international gatherings as the World Social Forum. This international assembly of community-based groups, nonprofit organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, begun in Porto Alegre in 2001, represents the increasing collaboration of grassroots efforts to oppose capitalist globalization that excludes the poor. This forum includes many groups who hold land reform as a central issue in their work. Some, such as the International Land Coalition, a popular coalition that advocates for pro-poor land policies to national and international agendas, are specifically focused on land reform. Those groups representing coalitions of myriad rural and indigenous groups, such as La Via Campesina, address land issues as one of the most relevant to their interests. These types of groups use political advocacy, research and publications, coalition-building, marches, and protests to promote their cause.

The second group, “radicals,” is quintessentially represented by the Brazilian MST, Movimento dos Sem Terras (Movement of the Landless). However, this category also includes more extreme groups such as the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico. The MST made famous the method of land occupation to assert a claim to land, the counter to legal approaches of land restitution. Also known as “squatting” or “land self-provisioning,” Moyo (2000), asserts that this method is becoming a “crucial aspect of the evolution of land reform” and has been observed in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Bangladesh, El Salvador and Malawi. In some cases, such as in Zimbabwe, demonstration by occupation has been a joint effort between locals and the state in order to push land reforms agendas against land-owning sectors such as the Commercial Farmers’ Union (Moyo, 2000). However, these sustained acts of land occupation often protest actual government land reform efforts as ineffective and inadequate. In the case of the MST, occupation settlements in rural areas are characterized by cooperative relations and collective planning and self-management, rejecting the private-property organization of Brazil’s land reform policies (Martins, 2000). Even more extreme, the Zapatistas oppose modification of laws that ended land reform and administration of outstanding land claims. Thus, they reject the authority

of the current Mexican government over their land. They recognize the administration's support of NAFTA as a threat to Mayan subsistence farming, and so declare regions in Chiapas autonomous (Gilbreth and Otero, 2001).

As a bottom-up, need-based method, popular movement land reform is essential in giving voice and attention to the land claims and needs of those marginalized from political and social power. It addresses unjust present and historical distribution from the perspective of the oppressed. Unlike government-led land reform which is managed by those with political authority (even when it has good intentions to serve the poor), or market-based reform which requires enough social and economic standing to enter market negotiations, the method of social mobilization is available to those without power as a means of creating a platform from which to speak. Moyo observes that "illegal land occupations have been a sporadic albeit influential force in keeping land redistribution on the [political] agenda" (2000, 8). Its only prerequisite is that communities be able to organize to create the desired impact.

Social mobilization is most utilized by two populations: indigenous groups and the landless poor. The struggle for indigenous groups is often related to obtaining secure rights, titles or access to traditionally held land. These claims are often of collective rights to land tenure, distinct from the private ownership focus of many government land reforms. In 2000 and 2001, Latin American indigenous organizations staged mass protests to urge governments to honor past commitments to protect land rights (Colchester et al., 2004). The movement has succeeded in obtaining recognition of collective property rights for indigenous people in nine Latin American governments (Deere and Leon, 2001). The growing recognition of indigenous people is visible in the recent success of the indigenous demonstrations in Bolivia and marches led by the Garifuna's of Honduras in December of 2006 (Thorne, 2004). These types of protests happen worldwide, with marches in Indonesia in May of 2006, land occupation in Bangladesh in December of 2006, and many others. There have also been setbacks, however, such as in the 1992 reform of Mexico that lifted the restriction on the selling of collectively owned land.

The landless poor (which can include indigenous groups, but is not limited to them) are also effectively employing social mobilization to press their land reform agendas. The most

visible and leading example of this is the MST in Brazil who became a prominent mass organization in the 1990s. This peasant group, supported by grassroots church organizations and the Worker's Party in Brazil, is internationally recognized for their effectiveness in pressuring for transfer of ownership. While the MST occupies unproductive property and public buildings to enforce confiscation of unproductive land, the Landless People's Movement of South Africa camps on areas formally belonging to them, demanding recovery. Land occupations by the MST increased from 43 in 1990 to 180 in 1997, totaling 698 in these seven years (Martins, 2000).

### **NEGOTIATED OR MARKET-BASED LAND REFORM**

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, market-based land reform continues to be the current trend in mainstream policy circles. In the context of structural adjustments and foreign debt recovery conditionalities sponsored by the IMF and World Bank in these decades, this method is in keeping with the focus on neoliberal policies that promote free markets as a means of poverty relief. This method of land reform depends upon land market for the redistribution of property ownership and follows a general model that combines civil, government and market sectors (El-Ghomeny, 2003).

In market-led agrarian reform, land is redistributed through the voluntary transactions of the land market. The three pilot programs funded by the World Bank in the 1990s in Brazil, Colombia and South Africa model a dual program of loans and grants. Buyers are given loans to buy land at 100% of its market value, which willing sellers receive in cash, providing a strong incentive to potential sellers. In the case of the three pilot programs, a fixed amount of money is given to participants. The percentage used to purchase land is considered a loan that must be repaid by the beneficiary, while the rest is considered a grant to be used for the development of land without repayment.

The government role in this method of land reform is to establish legal, political and institutional frameworks that ensure a level playing field for all. This involves removing the barriers in the banking and credit supply to landless rural people, reducing transaction costs of

land registration, supplying land market information, and providing technical support to new owners. They also provide loan and grant funding as a joint effort with international institutions, such as the World Bank (Borras, 2003). Although the state plays a supporting role, it does not “manage” or direct the process in such a way that it significantly controls the outcomes of reform as it does in the government-led methods discussed earlier.

This shift from the policy/institutional sphere to the market sphere as the setting for land reform has both advantages and disadvantages. In response to the failure of many mid-century reforms due to entrenched systems of political power, this method attempts a politically neutral land reform through the “politics-free” land market (El-Ghomeny, 2003). It also reduces the bureaucratic process that has made prior methods ineffective due to the tremendous inefficiency of enforcing new law and policy. Furthermore, by reducing the centralized management of land reform, it theoretically gives more agency to local people.

Many authors, including Borras (2003) and El-Ghomeny (2003), strongly refute the proposed benefits of this model. They observe that it is highly inaccurate to characterize land markets as non-political entities due to the unequal distribution of power, money, voice, and land they represent. Borras’ critique of the World Bank projects in Columbia, South Africa and Brazil questions the true effectiveness of the model. His opposition is based on the inequity of bargaining power between buyer and seller that limits market access to a certain threshold of social and economic standing. The rural poor cannot effectively articulate their demand for land because of their political powerlessness, and the market-led model used by the World Bank serves only those who have enough to be able to approach the program. He also describes the land transferred as often marginal and underutilized. In essence, though this method has had some success in getting land ownership to the rural poor, the long-term change affected by the model is questioned because traditional power-enclaves remain intact. Some authors even propose that “there is evidence that these market-based approaches have actually increased real landlessness in many rural areas” (Colchester et al., 2004).

Despite the critical reviews of the first applications of market-led land reform, it still remains at the forefront of applied methods by donor institutions partnering with governments.



As a potential means of collaborating local initiative, markets, and government assistance, this method of land reform is regarded as having high potential to be effective if context and application are correct. Deininger (1999) recognizes key elements required for the success of these land reforms: markets for land sales and rental must be transparent and fluid, productive projects must be a core element as essential to the establishment of economically stable farms, implementation must be demand-driven and decentralized in order to coordinate collaborating entities, and the private sector must be involved in aspects of training and development. He specifically calls for “ownership” of the program by local governments, public participation, and systems of monitoring and evaluation. He recognizes the two main reasons for unsuccessful land reform as an absence of funds to support infrastructural development on farms and support beneficiaries through the first harvest and a lack of access to credit and output markets. These deficiencies must be mediated by governments and NGOs if market-led reform is to be effective.

Although they are still rare, it is important to acknowledge the participation of private organizations in this market-based method of land reform. In Guatemala, Fundación El Centavo has been providing land and agricultural development support through a loan program for the landless poor since 1976. In Honduras, the Asociación PILARH , supported by the Belgium NGO Technical Cooperation Association (ACT), began a land purchase financing program in 1986 for the rural poor. The U.S-based non-profit EcoLogic Finance launched a land loaning program in Nicaragua in 2006 providing loans to cooperatives to purchase farmland upon market availability. Along with Agros International, those successfully involved in market reform from the private sector share a common practice of combining community and individual involvement. The process of loaning for the purchase of land incorporates cooperative or community stewardship and planning, with loans given in an individual form.

## **AGROS INTERNATIONAL METHOD**

Established in 1984, Agros International is an international non-profit that addresses rural poverty in Latin America through private market-based land reform. Established on a holistic conception of poverty that recognizes not just economic need but also the need for restoration of



environment, community, and dignity, the Agros development model emphasizes community planning and holistic development support. The program works with whole communities to provide both individual and communal land ownership. They are currently working in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Mexico.

The process of establishing a community which will receive land ownership begins with an extensive family selection process. This assures full understanding of expectations and a commitment to establishing a farming community as a group. This step is recognized by Agros as highly critical in ensuring the success of communities as they continue in the development and loan repayment process. Following selection, community organization is facilitated to identify common dreams, visions and plans for a sustainable village. This step also includes development of local leadership, governing bodies, and decision-making processes. Both of these phases prepare families to own their land, but also to “own” their future and communities.

The process of land acquisition is facilitated by Agros as they purchase appropriate land on the private market. After a seven to ten year loan repayment process, the community and individuals receive title to their land. Agros also provides loans to families to cover the costs of housing and irrigation. These capital loans come from the Noemí Fund, with repayments allowing Agros to continue to expand its aid to new communities. During the repayment period, Agros supports the development of infrastructure such as housing, roads, irrigation, potable water systems, community centers, etc. This is also a time of developing sustainable economic growth through provision of technical assistance for agricultural production, environmental sustainability and micro-industries. Further community education and training is provided to assure access to health care, basic education, and adult literacy training. Much of the funding for these supportive activities comes from partnerships with individuals, churches, businesses, and community groups who pledge financial support for five years.

In its joint grant/loan programming to achieve land ownership through already existing land markets, the Agros International model is in many ways closely aligned with the market-led reform described in the previous pages. In market-led reforms such as those funded by the World Bank, a heavy burden falls on potential beneficiaries to develop the agricultural, economic, and



social foundations necessary to allow their use of the land to be sustainable. The failure of market-led reform is often due to the lack of agricultural experience, education, or social leverage of the beneficiaries. As stated by Deininger, “potential beneficiaries are generally unable to go through the steps required in a “negotiated” type of land reform without assistance” (1999, 660). The support from Agros for productive development of agriculture and enterprise to achieve economic and environmental sustainability fills this gap in the market-led system. Furthermore, the processes of community planning and training prepare beneficiaries to become self-sustaining and self-managing communities.

Another shortcoming of market-led reform is the lack of improvement in land distribution equity because the rural poor cannot dictate their choice in land markets. This results in a lack of transformation of power or wealth dynamics. Like market-led reform, Agros does not address a long-term systemic plan for the equalization of land distribution or plan to directly reform unequal power relationships embedded in government policy, distribution of wealth, or political influence. However, as an international nonprofit, Agros serves as a mediator between governmental institutions and legal land systems, the local land market, and the local people. Because Agros has capital and the ability to negotiate complex land market systems, they are able to utilize the existing market to procure productive land in a way that a rural family could not. Agros can identify land for purchase based on word of mouth, allowing personal negotiation in the absence of the established-real estate commerce that hinders other market-based approaches to land reform. They are also able to define the quality and characteristics of the land they are willing to purchase which poor rural buyers on their own could not do.



Furthermore, the position of Agros as an international nonprofit makes it ideally situated to provide practical and efficient methods of land reform. In contrast to the long and bureaucratic process of policy change or legal restitution associated with government-led land reform, the ability to take advantage of local land markets allows Agros to produce results that effectively and quickly reach the local rural poor. This also places them outside the political pressures associated with government reform. Unlike large and systemic programs of reform managed by national governments, Agros can effectively cultivate local management. They are able to enact a family selection process that assures commitment, to cultivate planning unique to each community's needs, and to support local governance that equips all community members to participate in decision-making processes. In order to make their model responsive to beneficiaries rather than shaped by North American values, Agros has established in-country staff and experienced country directors who oversee local workings of the program and provide for a relevant administration of methods.

The primary distinguishing factor of the Agros model is their long-term integrative asset-building approach that serves to capacitate villages to sustainably self-manage their communities. In increasing economic and social stability, educational levels, and experience in self-governance of the marginalized rural poor, the impact made by land ownership is sustained. Sustainable communities positively affect neighboring villages and regional economies. This value of sharing the benefits of land ownership with neighboring communities and future generations is central to the organization. Through private rather than institutional methods of reform, Agros pursues the ground-up fostering of social justice and poverty relief from the community level.

## **CONCLUSION**

A survey of the scope of land reform methods can hardly do justice to the complexity and variation this field includes in the last century. Rights to land have been at the center of government reforms, social movements, and free market reforms. It is important to bear in mind in the study of the various applications and methods that the goal is not to discover one perfect solution to the world's problem of inequitable land distribution, but instead to understand the





nuances and implications of this topic. Contextualizing current choices of land reform methods in an understanding of the history and global scope of these movements will contribute to greater success in developing effective solutions. Regions and populations are specific, with unique histories, needs, and desires, and will require distinct applications of land reform methods that address their particular identities.

In the context of the three main categories of land reform methods, the Agros model stands out as one that utilizes practical methods of market-led reform yet fills gaps left by the standard application. It uses markets as a tool to meet the needs of people, rather than allowing markets to be an end in themselves. Understood in the broader context of land reform methods, the Agros model reveals weaknesses of traditional methods and offers practical solutions to their failures. Its strengths must be understood within its particular context where government-led land reforms have failed and social movements have proved only marginally effective in the face of often oppressive and unstable states. In this setting the Agros model works. When understood as a small piece in the whole horizon of international land reform, it provides insight that can be carefully applied elsewhere.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Binswanger, Hans P., Deininger, Klaus, and Feder, Gershon. (1993). Agricultural Land Relations in the Developing World. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 75(5), 1242-1248.
- Borras, Saturnino M. Jr. (2003). Questioning Market-Led Agrarian Reform: Experiences from Brazil, Columbia and South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change*. 3(3), 367-394.
- Burbach, Roger. (2006). Confrontation in Bolivia over Agrarian Reform. Retrieved 2/7/2007 from <http://www.landaction.org>.
- Carroll, Rory and San Felipe. (2006, October 23). International: Venezuelan reform billed as justice for landless peasants, policy is yet to be put into practice: Chavez revolutionary intent stalls amid stumbling bureaucracy. *The Guardian*, pp. 23. London.
- Ciamarra, U. Pica. (2004). Access to land through rental markets: a (counter-) evolution in the World Bank's land policy? *FAO Land Reform: Land Settlement and Cooperatives*, 2.
- Colchester, Marcus, Tom Griffiths, Fergus MacKay and John Nelson. (2004). Indigenous land tenure: challenges and possibilities. *FAO Land Reform: Land Settlement and Cooperatives*, 1.
- Deere, Carmen Diana and Leon, Magdalena. (2001). Institutional Reform of Agriculture under Neoliberalism: The Impact of the Women's and Indigenous Movements. *Latin American Research Review*, 36(2), 31-63.
- Deininger, Klaus. (1999). Making Negotiated land Reform Work: Initial Experiences from Columbia, Brazil and South Africa. *World Development*, 27(4), 651-672.
- Deininger, K., Feder, G., Gordillo de Anda, G. and Munro-Faure, P. (2003). Land policy to facilitate growth and poverty reductions. *FAO Land Reform: Settlement and Cooperatives*, 3.
- El-Ghomeny, M.R. (2003) Land Reform Development Challenges of 1963-2003 Continued into the Twenty-first Century. *FAO Land Reform: Land Settlement and Cooperatives*, 2.
- Flores, Edmundo. (1970). Issues of Land Reform. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 78(4), 890-905.
- Gilbreth, Chris and Otero, Gerardo. (2001). Democratization in Mexico: The Zapatista Uprising and Civil Society. *Latin American Perspectives*, 28(4), 7-29.

Harris, Richard L. (2002). Resistance and Alternatives to Globalization in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Latin American Perspectives*, 29(6), 136-151.

International Land Coalition. (2003). *Towards a Common Platform on Access to Land*. Rome.

Martins, Monica Dias. (2000). The MST Challenge to Neoliberalism. *Latin American Perspectives*, 27(5), 33-45.

Moyo, Sam. (2000). The Political Economy of Land Acquisition and Redistribution in Zimbabwe, 1990-1999. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26(1), 5-28.

Prosterman, Roy L. and Hanstad, Tim. (2003). Land Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: New Challenges, New Responses. *RDI Reports on Foreign Aid and Development #117*.

Riddell, Jim, et. al. (1997) Contemporary Thinking on Land Reform. Land Tenure Service Rural Development Division, FAO. Rome. Retrieved 2/7/07 from <http://www.landcoalition.org/docs/odfaomon1.htm>

Thorne, Eva T. (2004). Land Rights and Garifuna Identity. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 38(2), 21-26.