

ICARRD CONFERENCE REPORT

Statement presented to the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD)

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Agrarian reform is a very much alive issue - on the political agenda of many countries in Asia and Latin America and Southern Africa as a strategy for achieving greater equity and social justice as well as growth and development for the large numbers of poor people in developing and transition economies. The Conference brought together the experiences of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Mexico, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines with accounts from government, non-government and international agency actors involved in ongoing efforts to elaborate and implement programmes of redistributive reform. Participants distilled the lessons of agrarian reform and the problems of the absence of reform in a wide range of countries stretching from the central role reform played in the development of China, Taiwan, Vietnam and South Korea, to the problems of reform in Russia and the CIS and the legacy of the failure to implement reform in terms of persistent poverty even within the highly developed countries like the United States.

A wide consensus emerged on the positive contribution that more equal access to land and other assets makes to the fight against poverty and efforts to ensure sustained growth and stewardship of the natural environment. The particular shape of effective reform must be immediately linked to the specific economics and political conditions and historical experience of every country. Nevertheless, it was widely agreed that meaningful reform must involve a significant transformation of property rights and ensure access to the means to make agriculture more productive and sustainable. It must address the needs of those who work on the land including tenants, marginal farmers and landless workers - men and women alike - and be set in the context of a healthy balance between agricultural and industrial development.

During the course of our deliberations, a vibrant debate emerged over the model of 'market based reform' promoted by the World Bank in recent years. Many participants welcomed the fact that agrarian reform has been put back on the agenda of the Bank. Further, there was significant agreement that reform can only achieve its goals when rural producers and communities are organised to demand and participate in its implementation. **However, a majority of participants endorsed the idea that by definition agrarian reform must involve state regulation to overcome the failure of markets to deliver equitable, just and productive outcomes in agriculture and rural development.** The logic of agrarian reform is to bring together state action with the action of rural producers and communities to ensure that those who have previously been excluded from the benefits of growth and development can operate effectively within markets and secure livelihoods and opportunities for improvement.

In a series of workshops participants discussed the importance of political action and political organisation to achieving agrarian reform outcomes that benefit the poor. Agrarian reform can contribute to environmental sustainability, but farmers face a continued struggle to

balance conflicting concerns for increasing production and conserving the environment. Ensuring access to land and the means to make it productive and a diversified rural economy that guarantees improved incomes is a necessary condition for achieving a more environmentally sustainable path to development. Women are playing an active role in all aspects of agrarian reform, but must be ensured access to land rights. To effectively accomplish this, governments must collect gender sensitive data and evaluate the specific impact and accomplishments of reform in relation to women. Gender audits can make a valuable contribution to this process. **The shared experience of reform among participants in the conference led to a wide consensus over the need for strong and effective state action ensured through active involvement of peoples organisations.** Negotiations with international agencies must be undertaken from a clearly defined national agenda. Effective agrarian reform will continue to require direct action by rural producers as well as participation in elaborating laws and policies at the level of the state.

Through its deliberations, ICARRD underlined the necessity for continuing to bring together the shared experience from across the developing and developed world, and the positive contributions to agrarian reform of continued dialogue between actors from the state, intergovernmental, non-governmental and peoples organisations and the academic community.