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Difficulties and Tensions in Institutionalizing Peasant-Based and other Civil Society Organizations during the Transformation/ Post Reform

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The 1990s and the early part of the new millenium have seen a sharp reduction of government services to the rural poor in the Third World. An accompanying trend is more acute inequality in wealth and income. In the past government has played a prominent role in agrarian reforms, one of the primary rural development alleviation efforts. But it appears that public institutions are not equipped to step up their aid anytime soon and this leaves a gap that might be filled by civil society.

Indeed de Janvry et al. (1998) suggests a new orientation for land reforms in which "grassroots-led land reforms" play a more prominent role. They believe that these reforms could achieve a more viable sector for small holder agriculture than could the state. And they might be better able to counter problems of counter problems of rural violence and environmental protection. They cite the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST) in Brazil as an example; it has succeeded because it governs itself well and has links to the government, the church and other elements of civil society.

The overriding issue to be analyzed here is why there is so much difficulty in servicing these newly landed peasants and established small farmers. This paper will examine: 1) the contextual background of the rural development problem in the Third World; 2) the social/political difficulties of reaching the poor without agrarian reforms which often derail rural development efforts by civil society; 3) Strengths and weaknesses of various elements of civil society civil to reach the poor; 4) several cases.

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Background to the Problem

After years of neglect, the alleviation of poverty has again become an enunciated concern among international organizations (World Bank 2000/01) and in most developing countries. In general, experiments with a neo-liberal land policy over the last several decades have not had hoped-for salutary effects on the alleviation of poverty and inequity in the Third World. Yet, inter alia, it has led to the emergence of a viable commercial sector of agriculture in some countries. Agriculture in many developing economies is bifurcated with a modernized sector with the majority of land and a minority of people on one hand with a small part of the land and the majority of the people on the other. In much of Latin America there are also substantial remaining remnants of the unproductive hacienda in the large farm sector. In some countries, notably Taiwan and the Republic of Korea the structure of farming is far more egalitarian.

While agriculture is shrinking as a percent contributor to national product in almost all of the of the Third World, stimulating the farm sector is still a primary development goal, given the importance of increasing food security. In addition, a vital agricultural sector provides needed employment, increases the opportunities which exports may afford, and adds to rural demand for city products.

Nonetheless, some claim that there is a further dark side to recent agricultural development that negatively affects the poor majority of producers. Some believe that modern farming techniques have led modernizing middle size and larger farmers to absorb land from peasants who sell because of credit-induced distress sales. Further, they believe that mono-crop agriculture is causing environmental problems and forcing peasants to abandon the gardens and house-plots that they used to plant to a multiplicity of subsistence crops. This makes them customers for often-imported inputs which forces them into higher cost agriculture. Furthermore much of agriculture worldwide is suffering from lower commodity prices. Higher costs and lower prices--together with severe credit rationing-- bring about a cost-price squeeze that is particularly detrimental to small producers. All of this translates to more debt. In this vision the peasant class may be worse off now than before the neo-liberal policies began to hold sway. In general, neo-liberal policies have tended to benefit the richer farmers

relatively more than the poor ones (Duque Lopez 1998 and Zoomers and van der Haar eds. 2001).

Furthermore, there is the plight of the landless farm worker. Evidence shows that more commercial agriculture has meant more wage work for men and has also resulted in more youth and women entering the job market. But the super abundance of rural workers means low wages generally. And these jobs may be quite seasonal which force migration to occur in search of the harvest seasons at rather high psychic costs for family life.

Low farm incomes and low wages for farm workers implies that many poor farm families must devise other, sometimes quite intricate livelihood strategies. If the family has some land but it is inadequate to provide a high enough income for the family's survival and progress, some members of the family may work in towns, for neighboring farms, engage in petty commerce in the informal sector, or even migrate internationally sending repatriations to the family at home. These livelihood strategies are very heterogeneous, varying from community to community (Zoomers, ed.).

Some of these difficulties in the peasant sector of the economy have caused an unprecedented internal migration over the past several decades. In essence, rural areas have shuffled off their problems to cities and to frontiers. Urban relocation probably cannot continue indefinitely unless city economies grow much faster than they do today. As it is, urban facilities are inadequate to house, employ, and educate. Also utilities of all kinds are overtaxed. And when people move to the frontiers environmental problems caused by the destruction of forests poses an enormous problem. As is often the case, trees are cut, small farms are established by migrants, these farms prove not to be viable because of lack of proper soils, markets, or farming techniques. In this situation, sellouts to larger farmers raising cattle are legend.

Meanwhile there is unused agricultural land in many parts of the Third World. Ways need to be found to utilize this property to solve rural development needs. This means some re-thinking of the current development paradigm that goes beyond the "negotiated" or "market assisted" land reforms. Any new model should not only make it possible for peasants to gain access to land but make it possible for them to acquire the farming skills they need to be able to retain their property.

At the heart of many countries' policies toward rural development land reform has played an integral part. Some countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Philippines and countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union still struggle with the issues of a nascent land reform. These countries and others also deal with the problems of beneficiaries or other types of settlers and other communities of small farmers.

Who Will Help the Small Farmer and the Beneficiaries?

Most agrarian reforms these days are smaller rather than the wide sweeping agrarian reforms of such countries as China, Taiwan and the Republic of Korea. Agrarian reform beneficiaries are seldom able to move very far on the income ladder without services and inputs in addition to land. They must be able to translate land into income in order to better their position and for that they need extension assistance and help with accounts, titling, conflict resolution, inputs and credit.

The challenge these days is to 1) redirect government policy to small farmers, beneficiaries, and other elements of the rural poor 2) hope to pick up the slack in civil society, or 3) attempt to secure a cooperative arrangement between government and civil society to accomplish the task. There are several mitigating factors to each of these strategies.

For example, getting government to do more may be politically and economically impossible. Many governments are under domestic and international pressure to cut government expenditures to meet the requirements of structural adjustment programs to bring about a faster growing economy and a sounder currency. In the case of agriculture, SAPs may mean removing subsidies to inputs which may have a deleterious effect on production but when city subsidies on basic foodstuffs are retracted, increased farm prices may encourage production (Salih 1999, p. 31). Be that as it may, under SAPs many useful government programs have had to be sacrificed. Other countries are fighting costly wars or civil disturbances that quickly and wastefully absorb revenues. Increased military expenditure to insure internal and external security weakens the capacity of the state to address social issues. Also--and unfortunately-- assisting poor farmers ranks low in budgetary priority in many Third World countries.

Donor fatigue in industrial countries also is affecting budgets of developing countries. While industrial countries had increased their gross national products about 30 percent in the decade ending with the year 2000, they had also decreased their foreign assistance by about the same percentage. The richest industrial country, the United States, spends less than 1 percent of its national budget on aid to developing countries and aid to rural projects has unfortunately become less of a priority item than in recent previous years.

As Mullen (1999, p. viii) summarizes, “ External and domestic constraints related to indebtedness, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate accountability have all contributed to the eroding ability of the state to intervene.”

The general inability of government to deliver inputs, credit, and services to land reform beneficiaries leaves more of the job to civil society than ever before. Civil society, as the term is to be used in this paper consists of both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and farmer’s organizations, also called grassroots organizations, popular organizations (POs), or local organizations of multiple definition. In general a grassroots organization is a more or less formalized and durable grouping of people, who join together to achieve either a shared purpose or, through joint efforts, attempt to satisfy individual or shared needs. The grassroots organization attempts to mobilize locally or regionally available skills, labor, or other assets for some productive or income-generating purpose.

While there are social aspects to grassroots organizations, the glue that holds them together is usually of an economic nature (Drawing from Boland 1997, p. 14-15, who draws from Holmen and Jirstrom). Sometimes the initiatives and organizations set up by the poor themselves in order to reach a specific goal is called a “popular movement” and it is supported by its own federations operating at the state or even federal level. The movement has to construct a coherent and resilient internal structure but it also has to build alliances between rural and industrial workers, with other popular organizations such as student and other academic groups and other parts of society opposed to the status quo (Boland 1997, p. 12).

In contrast, NGOs are set up to serve the popular movements. They are intermediary organizations involved in development or environmental activities that have as their objective improvements in the social, political,

and economic status of the poor. They work either through direct interventions and/or by organizing their target group which is often a grassroots organization or the more complex popular movement (Drawing from Boland 1997, p.14 who draws from Robinson). Alam (1998) notes that NGOs are categorized in what is sometimes referred to as the third or voluntary sector (NGOs are sometimes called private voluntary organizations or PVOs) to distinguish them from the public (state) and the private market sectors. Atteh (1999) defines them as non-government, non-private organizations, whose primary objective is to provide material, technical, financial and administrative assistance to the needy at little or no cost to them.

Land Reform is often needed to Spread Benefits to the Poor

Without land reform, chances of benefiting the rural poor in many countries with NGO or government help seem dim indeed. Social structure often impedes their best efforts to serve small farmers. Examples abound the world over. A recent study of North East Brazil in the Sao Francisco Valley where there has been little reform and resettlement documented many subverted and poorly coordinated and targeted government plans and projects. Boland (1997, p. 177) concludes: “ Although most development plans explicitly mention poverty alleviation and support for the resource-poorest groups, no significant reduction in regional poverty and income disparities has occurred. Instead, the development programmes spend large amounts of money which benefit large landlords and capitalist companies most, while excluding the majority of the population. Although most irrigation projects were initially meant for small farmers, they have displaced far more people than were resettled The number of jobs created was wholly insufficient to absorb all the displaced labor.”

It is not unusual for rural development programs to be subverted by the rural rich. And the annals of development literature for decades have realized this as a basic truth. For example, In 1978, Lane Holdcroft analyzed the community development approaches that dominated failed efforts at rural reconstruction in the middle of the 20th century. He concludes: "During the era of the 1950s and 1960s when the 'trickle down' theory of economic development was in vogue, community development programs were not intended to, nor did they, affect the basic structural barriers to equity and growth in rural communities. Rather, they accepted the existing local power

structure as a given. Usually community development village-level workers aligned themselves with the traditional village elites, thus strengthening the economic and social position of the elites. There was little attention given to assuring that benefits from community development programs accrued to the rural poor. Realizing this, the majority of the villagers did not respond..."(p. 19-20).

Likewise, van Schendel examined the famous Comilla rural development experiment founded in Bangladesh in 1959-60 of which, he says, "It was praised as the key to rural development in the whole country, in Asia and even in the entire Third World (p. 28)." While it did raise production, the rich peasants realized most of the production gains. Furthermore, when the program was analyzed in 1981, van Schendel found that the rich found ways to bilk the cooperative structure established by monopolizing credit and input use. As he concludes by examining a village, " This failure of the Comilla program to break through the existing patterns of power and distribution has been well documented. The result has been that at the village level it has become an instrument in the hands of the rich." (p.32).

Yet, examining recent Comilla program documents one might come away with the notion that it did all the right things to help the poor. This effort at meeting the needs of small-scale farmers was developed at Comilla by the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). Its program was based upon initial research and experimental projects conducted in Kotwali Thana, BARD's "experimental laboratory" (Ahmed, 1999) . Its goal was to bring about "security of survival" for rural small-scale farmers (and some landless) people; ideas from its work formed the basis for rural development programs in Bangladesh, such as the Grameen Bank, and spread abroad. The essence of the program was to bring about the improvement of rural society through people's participation and self-reliance. BARD aimed to relate to government agencies charged with rural development duties.

Several elements comprised the Comilla model:

1. Establish a training and research institution, the Academy;
2. Affiliate the Academy with a county (thana). The purpose of this laboratory area was to carry out survey research on the social structure and development needs there and organize pilot projects;
3. Consult with the villagers regarding their development problems and gather their perceptions on how to deal with them;
4. Collaborate closely with the National Planning Commission, sharing with it the results of the village studies;

5. Evaluate continuously the pilot projects to discover their weaknesses and revise them whenever necessary;
6. Provide assistance to government agencies in the replication of the model to other counties;

What developed over time was the belief that villagers themselves have the best understanding of the problems they confront so the solutions to them should be approached from their point of view. Furthermore, villagers themselves are capable of bringing about changes in their lives if they have access to sources of capital, training, technical inputs, etc. And while agricultural growth is an essential step in bringing about rural development, the concept is broader than simply raising farm incomes. The Academy's approach focussed on villages as the starting point for rural modernization and a cooperative would be organized there and at the thana level. The program also emphasized the importance of empowerment at both the individual and community levels. It defines the concept as the "process which enables individuals or groups to change balances of power in social, economic, and political relations in a society. It refers to many activities, including but not confined to awareness of the social forces which oppress people and to actions which change power relationships (Ahmed, 1999, pp 86-87).

In fairness, Ahmed does admit that the model has been criticized for not altering person-land relationships and because the better off peasants, those with a richer resource base, were able to capture more benefits of the program than poorer farmers (Ahmed 1999 p. 85).

The difficulty of civil society making changes that actually improve the situation of the rural poor should therefore not be underestimated. Arrayed against any set of organizations meant to help the poor is usually another coalition within civil society favoring the status quo, often led by landed interests that regard advances by the peasants as an incursion into the rights and privileges of the rural elite. Even in a state that has a history of peasant rebellion and unrest does not assure a positive outcome for the poor peasant. Reddy (1997) documents a history of concerted peasant action on land matters in Andhra Pradesh going back deep into the nineteenth century.

Summing up the more contemporary situation, Reddy claims "...where an agrarian reform legislation of a somewhat radical nature when compared to

all previous legislations has been enacted, the role of the peasantry as well as issues involved underwent changes. From the earlier stand of preventing the initiation and enactment of radical land reform, the landlords' emphasis has been shifted to delaying and scuttling the implementation of ceiling legislation already enacted." Furthermore the landlords joined in a coalition with rich peasants, wholesale traders, and transporters. It made it impossible for the Congress Party to carry out its reforms. It not only removed a chief minister who successfully got the ceiling legislation enacted but it also succeeded in delaying the implementation process. (Reddy, 1997, pp252-253)."

Reddy documents that the peasantry got prepared organizationally and politically to face the landlord challenge in the 1977-87 period, concentrating on effective implementation of ceiling legislation. But they still were no match for the manipulation of the landlords. Reddy concludes: "The prolonged agitations of the landless poor and small peasants during this decade (1977-87) maintained pressure from below sufficiently strong enough to compel the government to implement land reform laws. In other words, the mobilization of the rural poor is a precondition for effective implementation of land reforms....But on the other hand, the landlords made successful attempts in evading the ceiling laws to a larger extent. They adopted novel methods to evade ceiling laws in areas where the peasant movement was weak. Therefore, still bigger efforts are necessary on the part of the rural poor to resist landlord's efforts (Reddy, p. 255)."

Presumably land reforms in many countries might serve to equalize the power structure and make possible a wider distribution of benefits by reducing the power of the rich to channel benefits their way. In his analysis of community development programs Holdcroft concluded that in Korea where land reform had created relatively homogeneous communities benefits received did reach their stated objectives. (p. 20).

Post Land Reform

The usual role of peasant organizations is to press the government through demonstrations, rhetoric, land invasions, and other forms of civil disobedience into taking action on land reforms. But the skills of making coherent demands and employing charisma to unite the peasantry that characterize peasant groups petitioning for land are often not as useful in the

post reform period. For after land reforms occur, a new set of problems arises for the peasants that have to do with creating viable farm enterprises and a workable community structure.

The talent necessary to manage a successful farm enterprise and the agronomic skills and knowledge to bring that about may be lacking. Also the leadership skills that were useful in pressing the government for reform are not be of the same nature as those needed for community development. Sometimes peasant groups themselves do not recognize that the leaders who served them so well in the pre-reform period may not perform as well post-reform. It is also probably the case that NGOs can be more helpful to peasant organizations at this stage than at the pre-reform. NGOs often show an aversion to participating in highly political acts such as pressing governments for reforms. On the other hand they often represent a repository for all kinds of technical, managerial, and social skills that are needed by the beneficiaries.

It is not only policies of the neo-liberal period that brings about a denial of needed government services in the post-reform period. The reason that the actions of NGOs can become so crucial in the post reform is that historical cases can be cited in which governments that facilitated their land grant has abandoned beneficiaries. Spending priorities change as other sectors of society claim their turn at receiving government attention and largesse. After the bulge in land reform activity in Mexico in the nineteen thirties which was spearheaded by President Lazaro Cardenas, succeeding governments turned to industrial development and the remaining sector of commercial farming. This shift was occasioned by the Mexican government's shift to the right and its need for industrial development. This was coupled by demands of the elites for their "share of the action." Similar shifts can be seen in other countries that have come through periods of intense agrarian reform such as Chile in the early 1970s.

Some Asian reforms, especially Taiwan but also the Republic of Korea and lately --and arguably-- China were more successful than the Latin American reforms at not dropping the land reform beneficiaries from their budgetary agenda in the process of this shift. These more encompassing reforms could not omit attention to beneficiaries because the health of the agricultural sector depended on them to keep the sector vital. If farming failed, the industrial wage would have to be increased just to meet the increased food

costs and this move might have choked off industrial profits and brought economic development to a standstill. Less inclusive reforms could shift these production priorities to a remaining group of commercial farmers to accomplish the same goal.

Also in less inclusive reforms enough remains of the existing rural social political structure to possibly subvert it. Therefore it is incumbent upon NGOs to recognize that without careful targeting of benefits there is a reasonable worry that any benefits they offer may be diverted from the new landowners and their communities. And even in the case of a land reform that aims to distribute land equally, there is the distinct possibility that a set of more innovative--or simply clever-- beneficiaries will attempt to capture the lion's share of the benefits.

Political Goals and Necessities of NGOs

To cultivate middle class and liberal-leaning allies, it is incumbent upon land reform beneficiary groups to shift from the purely confrontational mode that characterized the pre-reform period. It is crucial, at this point, for the grassroots groups to attempt to build alliances with NGOs while keeping some pressure on the governments to obtain credit for inputs. And alliances should also be forged with other elements of civil society as appropriate—church groups, trade unions, educators, public officials, human rights activists, political parties, journalists, legal experts, and others—in order to strengthen their social and economic position and secure their land rights. One needs to remember that in smaller scale agrarian reforms which characterize those occurring today the national social structure has not been changed very much and the threat of external subversion may be strong. For beneficiaries, alliances with NGOs can assist newly landed peasant groups fend off outside efforts to encroach upon their newly gained land (and defend them in land disputes) and cheat them in other ways such as offering extortionate interest rates or unfair pricing policies for inputs and products.

Accomplishing these tasks is often impossible without the help of more powerful outsiders who are capable inter alia of mobilizing sympathetic members of the middle class, reaching out to legal experts and the court system, attracting the attention of the media, and tapping into technical expertise. Previously landless and unorganized workers who have been awarded land recently usually need assistance in obtaining these alliances, however. Sometimes these alliances may be best forged if middle peasants

perceive they have common interests with the new beneficiaries, like common infrastructure projects or reduced land taxes (see Ghimire, 1999).

One possibility for civil society is to fill the gap left by missing governmental services is for peasant organizations to federate and to augment their usual union-type duties with those dealing with commercialization and financing of agricultural production so that the resultant organization would be able to export to agro-industry. Baumeister (2001) examined a number of these organizations in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras and paints a bleak picture of their results. He claims that these efforts inherited many of the negative aspects of government management, such as low managerial capacity, corruption in resource management, political use of economic instruments, and "populism to curry favor with the grassroots." His analysis leads him to conclude, "This obviously translated into losses in commercial operations, a low payback rate in the credits given to grassroots groups, bankruptcy, and liquidation of existing assets.

Strengths and Weaknesses of NGOs in the Post-Reform Period

There are several views on the strengths and weaknesses of NGOs during the process of grassroots development that have been framed by Atteh (1999). He claims that NGO proponents argue that at the local level NGOs are more capable than government at providing financial help to beneficiaries and articulating their needs. They believe that NGOs are more effective in reaching the poor, the neglected, and others not served by public agencies or commercial establishments; in mobilizing local resources and public opinion around issues such as poverty and delivering services to the needy and in promoting local participation by encouraging local groups to adapt to local conditions. Because of their small size, administrative flexibility, and relative freedom from political constraints, NGOs are able to solve problems more efficiently than local arms of bureaucratic government agencies. Unlike government agencies, NGOs can act more quickly and with minimum delay to commit organizational resources, and can place strong pressure on the state to create and implement new policies. They will also act with more empathy and compassion than the business sector.

Finally, contrasting NGOs with government and the business sector, proponents often see governments as inefficient and corrupt and commercial enterprises too concerned with their own short term gain.

Atteh also notes that there is an opposing school of thought that is critical of NGOs and the grassroots development model. It argues that there are fundamental problems with too much reliance on NGOs. These include their philosophy of idealizing smallness when they should be aiming at more inclusion. Critics also feel that they often offer relatively limited managerial skills and technical expertise at the local level, they have limited technical capacity for complex projects and a limited ability to sustain themselves after foreign funds are withdrawn. They also tend to engage in short term rather than long term planning. Some critics also maintain that NGOs often tend to ignore political and social structural realities at the national level so they are vulnerable to attack if their programs run counter in any way to governmental policies. Furthermore, they do not have the resources to manage larger programs so they can never meet the bulk of development needs. Critics also claim that NGOs have a limited ability to replicate projects as their strength and effectiveness are often derived from smallness which evaporates when they try to expand. In addition even successful NGO project cannot be replicated nationally because costs per beneficiary are high even though overall budgets are small.

Uphoff, et al (1998) also writes of the difficulty of expansion of the activity of a rural development program, though they list more inclusiveness as a characteristic of a successful effort. They suggest that rural development programs such as those meant to service land reform beneficiaries and small-scale farmers begin as pilots. Pilot projects should function as "learning laboratories", "to gain and refine knowledge of what will work under particular conditions. Learning to be effective and then efficient should lead to a phase of learning to expand, where the program is demand driven, meeting needs that are recognized and real" (p.202). They cite of two kinds of expansion. One is "scaling up" to meet the demands of a larger area and population. The second is incorporating more services and tasks. As these are accomplished management problems become more difficult and the skill level of NGOs must be up graded. Of course, as these NGOs are "scaled up" financial problems become more acute.

Scaling up and diversification risks dilution and diminution of effort and, thus, loss of political support. If scaling up results in too rapid an effort, finances may be strained. Scaling up may sacrifice the support of the original group of beneficiaries. On the other hand, if NGOs do not expand they may risk ossification and slip into irrelevance and lethargy. But any expansion must be accomplished with a careful eye to the financial and

managerial resources available and to the demands of the communities of beneficiaries.

There is another issue that may limit the effectiveness of NGOs to service small farmers. Alam claims, with the benefit of hindsight, that NGOs' worth as agents of change and development is sometimes seriously compromised for political reasons. Sometimes governments in developing countries have been known to use them as convenient vehicles for establishing grassroots links more for consolidating the top-down political control than for implementing programs aimed at poverty alleviation. Coupled with this is the problem that a growing number of NGOs are becoming increasingly "elitist" in their outlooks, and far from committed to the cause of the poor and the vulnerable in their objectives. He believes that some NGOs exist chiefly as a mechanism for appropriating aid resources to channel them to non-development ends.(Alam 137).

Regardless of the soundness of arguments pointing to the shortcomings of the NGOs, their weak points need to be recognized and some can be overcome. It should never be expected that NGOs could completely replace the potential financial might of government. But given the recent retraction of government services to rural areas a next best solution is to replace it with NGO effort. Civil society is needs somehow to stem the adverse effects of structural adjustment programs that brought a near halt of government services to the rural poor in many countries. SAPs came into prominence at the same time that authoritarian regimes were collapsing in many parts of the world thus providing NGOs some space as more democratic institutions arose. Alam writes "The advent of the 'New World Order' brought with it a new set of opportunities in which NGOs have been called upon to play a very distinct and important role which neither the state nor the market knew how to handle. NGOs came to play a residual role of covering the gap left by the market and the state in the course of addressing the problems of poverty and unemployment." The era of globalization brings with it opportunities for civil society that neither the market or government will be able to handle.

Need for NGO Coalitions

The proper role for NGOs in the process of rural development, according to Alam, should be to supplement top-down development by encouraging empowerment and participation on the part of the poor in their own

development in order to make the process self-sustaining in the long run. What this implies is that groups of beneficiaries should be encouraged to enunciate their own goals and priorities and NGOs should help them carry them out. The problem with this is, of course, that the NGO in question may not have the necessary expertise to be able to assist the small farmer group very much. Or it may have its own agenda. The danger is that it may then act as authoritatively as government might to impose its own ideas about "what the community needs." This endangers the effectiveness of the NGO and may embitter the beneficiary community that has often gone through planning and goal-setting exercises.

The implication is that NGOs themselves need to develop coalitions with other parts of civil society and other NGOs to address the goals of the small-farmer community in question. If agronomic issues predominate and the assisting NGO does not have the needed skills in that area, it should endeavor to plug in the needed technical skills from other sources. The same, of course, is true if the community needs safe water technology, etc. While this may sound sensible and obvious, it is less facile than it seems. NGOs and other organizations in civil society are often in intense competition with one another for funding and for recognition. So it is not unusual to see them "divide up the pie" and the beneficiary market and attempt to exclude interlopers into their physical and client territory which has, over the years, become sacrosanct and inviolable.

Part of the problem is the manner in which donors proffer their assistance. They may well measure the success of NGOs on how many clients have been served rather than on the basis of how well clients have been able to meet their expressed needs and goals. Therefore the goals of the facilitating NGO, the organization that assists beneficiaries meet their own targets by forming coalitions and plugging in skills from other parts of the society are given short shrift.

Alam adds strongly to this argument by noting that to the extent that donors monitor the use of resources allocated to NGOs, their accountability is visible. What is not visible is the role of beneficiary groups in the decision-making process and hence "in the accountability and even accessibility of NGOs to these groups...There is ...evidence that donor's involvement tends to discourage participation by the beneficiary communities, making NGOs accountable to donors and not to the beneficiaries.(p. 141). Alam does not negate the need for donors monitor NGOs. He feels, however, "the need to

examine the inter-related issues of participation and accountability and how these can be achieved and assessed in a manner that is satisfactory to all (p. 141).”

He further believes that while NGO collaboration with governments and donor agencies is important “the rather close and cosy relationships which NGOs seek to forge with government agencies and donors can be damaging to the image and work of NGOs, particularly if such relationships are sustained at the expense of concern for the poor (p. 141).”

Alam concludes, “ If NGOs are yet to inspire confidence, they will need to effectively assert their concern for the real stakeholders in the development process, namely the grassroots communities, by incorporating into their organizational systems mechanisms that would enable prospective beneficiaries to be involved in NGO decision-making processes. The participation of the beneficiary communities in the activities of NGOs would make the NGOs transparent and ultimately accountable to the people they are out to serve. Donor agencies, on whose funds NGOs continue to thrive, can also call the tune for NGOs to reconsider their ultimate accountability as agents of grassroots development (p. 142).”

Civil Society vs Government

While the pre-agrarian reform relationship between government and grassroots liberal elements of civil society is adversarial, an argument can be made that an ideal post reform relationship should be somewhat more cooperative. Nonetheless, the grassroots calls the shots. The International Federation of Agricultural Producers in the Philippines sounds a similar theme as it maintains that effective organizations are essential to rural development. “IFPAP maintains that such strengthening requires not only pro-active farmers’ groups at the grassroots, but also effective farmer representation at all levels—local, district, national, regional and global through farmers’ organizations (Pertev and King, 2000, p. 28). Furthermore, “ IFAP recommends that all institutions working in the agricultural sector...should be encouraged to adapt their services to the particular needs expressed by farmers, and especially small-scale and women farmers. This requires greater interaction between these institutions and farmers’ organizations, and the establishment of effective dialogue and partnerships with farmers. Farmers can no longer afford top-down institutions, which do not effectively serve farmers and which do not allow a substantial degree of

farmer participation in their operations...In a well functioning farmers' organization, it is the grassroots which holds the control. (pp. 29-30). “

All of this might be interpreted as a profoundly conservative message—that the poorest elements of society must somehow pull themselves up by their own bootstraps without much help from their privileged fellow citizens. As Harriss notes, part of the enthusiasm for building civil society stems from the fact that it is consistent with the neo-liberal agenda calling for reducing the role of the state so that large cuts can be made in social expenditures. In contrast, Harriss believes that civil society can thrive only in a framework of institutions established by governments. He believes that there is merit as institutions are built from the grassroots, because development will be informed by and be responsive to people's ideas, needs, and interests.

Harriss asserts, “ Decentralisation is thought to be, if not a condition for such development, certainly a powerful facilitator of it, and arguments in favour of decentralisation overlap with those in support of participation.” But, he also believes that there are limitations to some of these ideas. Communities and neighborhoods are often not the location of reciprocity, mutuality and collective action because class and identity divide them. For that reason the community development efforts of the 1950s were so plagued by difficulties—they did not reach the poor and were taken over by local power holders. On the other hand some communities may have a great deal of mutuality and reciprocity but little else that leads to development. Also sometimes, strong community ties stifle enterprise and initiative.. It has been noted that communities need both bonding capital—strong ties between members—and bridging capital—strong external connections that can be supplied by government.

Tendler found in her studies of Ceara, Brazil, that the best operations involved a three-way positive dynamic between civil society, local government, and central or state government. She found that institutions in civil society played an important role in the improvement of government performance and that their impact was at least as important at the local government level as at higher ones. Her argument is that while analyzing the operations of civil society organizations is important, so is their interaction with government..

When Grassroots Control Fails

When beneficiaries of land reform or other communities of small farmers are confronted with technical problems, control by the grassroots may be compromised. In cases of households that are dependent on a single irrigation system, cooperation of the users at the grassroots is essential. But there is also a need for dependence on a certain amount of the technical expertise when it comes to system design, maintenance of the system, and recuperation of a neglected system. In Betsiboka project in Madagascar which aimed to rehabilitate an irrigation system, user groups, each of which has 50 to 100 members and consisted mainly of farmers and tenants who farm the land on the same secondary canal, were to take over maintenance and water distribution tasks.

It was necessary, therefore, to integrate organizational development and technical assistance into a single process. In this case the organizational extension workers played the role of catalysts in the establishment of user groups while, on the other, they acted as process facilitators in the planning and implementation of rehabilitation measures. The process, called concerted rehabilitation, was set in motion in those places where farmer interest was most pronounced and then it was extended very gradually to all sectors of the irrigation perimeter.

The user groups started as loose, noncommitted gatherings and then were encouraged to carry on a dialogue with irrigation engineers. Because of the seriousness of beneficiaries at those meetings, technical people took them seriously. Only when a sort of partnership between beneficiaries and technical people emerged were water user groups founded with a statute and a legally binding status.

Musch and Schmidt-Kallert (2000, p.42-43) explain, “ The core aspect of concerted rehabilitation is the planning proposal developed by the farmers themselves. In a meeting assisted by a facilitator to take stock of the status quo, the farmers first get a clear understanding of their problems. This is followed by brainstorming and discussion of the conceivable solutions proposed.” The process is followed in each of the water user groups in the region. The extensionists are particularly concerned to ensure that all groups—landowners, young, old, tenant farmers, members of various ethnic groups are brought into the discussion. The facilitator tries to minimize solutions that might bring about potential conflicts. At the end of the discussion the farmers’ proposed plan is discussed with the irrigation engineers.

In turn, the engineers suggest where technical problems might arise. Because it is not possible to implement all elements of the plan proposed by farmers simultaneously, a priority list is drawn up between a designated spokesperson from the water users' group and the engineer. This often results in a number of meetings with landowners and tenants.

This planning process, which attempts to combine the desires of the irrigation beneficiaries with the technical necessities of the process, is been used for the past eight years in Betsiboka with great success. While it has not been easy to set the terms of the dialogue between the engineers and the farmers, experience has shown that technical solutions can be found which take into consideration the interests of all involved. These can be implemented with comparatively simple resources and which do not lead to high maintenance costs. “ The relationship between farmers and irrigation engineers is now one of mutual respect, and even of trust in many cases. More than that: the farmers now identify much more closely with the rehabilitated structures than in the past. This is apparent from the fact that wanton modifications to the irrigation facilities or even their destruction practically no longer occur. (p. 43)”

History of the Beneficiary Groups

Some organizational difficulties in the post-reform period are related to the past history of the beneficiaries. Enriquez (1997) examines several case studies of agrarian reforms under the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. He concludes that when beneficiaries and their parents were land poor and could earn only a small portion of their livelihood from their own minifundios (and the rest from rural wage labor), they could be enticed into organizing cooperatives in which farm work was collective. Under these conditions, they participated in the local decision-making and remained loyal to the popular government that had assisted them.

The result was different when most beneficiaries had at least a two-generation background of farming and they were more substantial minifundistas. They did not need to work off the farm for wages very frequently and they obtained some land in the reform process but mainly benefited in other resources. They continued to farm individually, and Enriquez found that they identified more with the conservative landed class and the middle peasantry than with poorest group. Furthermore, they

supported non-popular political parties. As a result, the latter group received smaller benefits from the Sandinista government. Demobilization after the mid 1980s caused by economic problems and war loosened Sandinista control of the agrarian reforms, promoted gradual individualization of more rural properties, and destroyed much of the organization that existed. The Sandinista period ended in 1990 with the victory of the UNO coalition supported by many campesinos on individual parcels

Some NGOs have strengths and weaknesses borne of their associations with international funders and/or counterparts. Atteh's research led him to study a rural development project involving 500,000 individual farmers in arid Northern Nigeria. The project was designed to replace the ancient waterwheel with a series of tube wells. The World Bank supplied the wells and motorized pumps while an NGO supplied the training for how to use them. This training is critical because whether the project is sustainable or not depends on the ability of the water users to manage the simple technology of the project. In addition to irrigating a large area throughout the year the thus containing the spread of the desert from the north, the project will supply clean, safe drinking water.

Atteh feels that this is a successful example of the coupling of international funding and work of an NGO. The project, begun in 1992 has increased agricultural productivity by 20 percent in the area and increase production four-fold. The project will bring drinking water to over two million people. The demonstration farms and training have enabled farmers to improve farming techniques, seed varieties, use of fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides, storage of harvested products, basic record keeping, farm planning and record keeping.

Sometimes NGOs Avoid Working with Agrarian Reform Communities

Unfortunately some NGOs—even those dealing with rural development—consciously avoid working with agrarian reform communities. They may regard these reforms as too politically motivated and they do not want to alienate themselves from the political parties who did not sponsor the

reforms. At other times they may regard the government agencies working with beneficiaries as too bureaucratized, corrupt, or unresponsive to be worth the trouble.

Then, too, NGOs do not usually have the funds to purchase the inputs or credit that the reform beneficiaries need in order to run a successful farm operation and they may also lack the ability to tap into government or private enterprise where these resources reside. Some countries may be making an effort to decentralize government functions to the province and local levels. In the Philippines, agricultural services have been decentralized but agrarian reforms have not, bringing about coordination problems for any NGO attempting to link needed resources to beneficiaries.

On the other hand one of the best services that can be provided for beneficiaries is to link them up with appropriate government agencies by organizing them into bargaining groups. Because typically many government agencies are charged with assisting beneficiaries, linking the two is a very useful undertaking and would be a daunting task for unaided peasants.

But there is also a problem with the general availability of government resources for reform beneficiaries. Because landlords must be reimbursed at market price for their property, very few funds are available for inputs, credit, and services. In the Bicol, one of the poorest regions in the Philippines, agrarian reform hectareage for 2001 was recently cut from 26,000 hectares to only 8,000 (Personal conversation with Dominador B. Andres, Regional Director, Department of Agrarian Reform, Legazpi City, April 25, 2001).

NGOs may also have some inherent weaknesses that make it difficult for them to work with agrarian reform beneficiaries. Often they do not have adequate ways of measuring their effectiveness. It is essential to their well being and future funding to have before and after studies to measure what happened in very concrete terms because of their actions. Variables such as increase in income, increase in health status, increase in resources owned are appropriate. Instead NGOs sometimes measure means and not ends giving undo weight to technologies adapted (which sometimes are inappropriate and do not translate into higher living standards) or groups organized (which may quickly come apart if costs of belonging exceed benefits of staying together). Then, too, some NGOs may become more enamoured with

process and abstract frameworks and theories than with accomplishments that relate directly to increasing the livelihoods or the welfare of the beneficiaries.

Another shortcoming of NGOs is that sometimes they are refuges for former high level officials in a former government and that makes it difficult for them to work with the present one.

Beneficiaries often need Legal Aid

Illustrating the need for legal aid for beneficiaries from civil society in the Philippines has been the harassment of beneficiaries by former landowners who have been known to repossess the land because they feel that government compensation to them has not been sufficient. They have used legal loopholes in the present agrarian reform legislation and "resorted to outright violence, often with the aid of para-military forces, to evict tenants. Other miscarriages of justice have involved the issuing of false claims, slowing down or canceling of legal land titles, multiple titling of the same plot, and the rapid and sometimes illegal conversions of agricultural lands to industrial or commercial plots.

Certificate of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) are frequently not handed over to beneficiaries as promised. Land titles may be awarded to people who were not residents of the area, as well as to those who were not peasant farmers. In other cases, CLOAs given to farmers have been annulled...on the grounds that legal errors were made. It is estimated that 67,442 hectares affecting some 25,062 farmer beneficiaries have been confiscated in this way....Such misuse of the legal system seems fairly widespread and clearly undermines the steps taken by the CARP (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program)" (Ghimire, 1999, pp. 13-14).

Even so, despite CARP's many problems it has for the first time created a working relationship between NGOs, POs and GOs. Civil society groups have used this relationship to involve themselves actively in agrarian reform dialogues at all levels, according to Ghimire. (1999, p.14-15).

There are also problems with civil society picking up the slack left by government in aiding beneficiaries of agrarian reform. One of the foremost is the lack of resources and clout that civil society does not have and only the state can provide. Also the place of popular movements in advocacy and in generating pressure for agrarian reform is well known. The best known

contemporary example may be the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra in Brazil and the Zapatista organization in Chiapas in Mexico. But it is difficult to convert advocacy groups who mount a program demanding land to those that press for actual services, infrastructure, organization, inputs, and credit for actual beneficiaries.

The reason why this conversion is so difficult is the difference between simple and complex goals. It is becoming easier than in the recent past to muster support for transparent social goals from an expanding urban middle class posed against a weakened agrarian oligarchy in the name of historic injustice and the amelioration of contemporary rural poverty. Land ownership is a frequent desire often expressed by peasant groups often led by a charismatic leader. Land invasions often dramatize the resolve and persistence of the petitioning groups who receive abundant press and other media coverage for their efforts.

But when these groups receive land, the general public assumes their problems have been solved, justice has been done, and the agrarian issue has been ameliorated. Few recognize that while one factor of production has been provided, services, inputs, and credit do not come automatically with the land and without them making a livelihood is impossible. Indeed, the economic, social, and legal problems faced by new beneficiaries of land are formidable. Furthermore, the leadership that proved successful in helping to countervail the government and obtain the land is usually not as adept at the less dramatic and newsworthy day to day life management duties: helping to resolve disputes among beneficiaries, negotiating farm boundaries, consulting with government agencies on titling of property, arguing with banks about possible credit, obtaining from suppliers the needed inputs, establishing consensus on how to locate health and educational facilities, etc. (Thiesenhusen, ed. 1989; Thiesenhusen 1995).

So the promise of agrarian reform is not fulfilled by merely transferring land ownership to the farmer. Achieving the more complicated task for the new owner-cultivator of improving and sustaining the land's productivity (without the intervention of the previous landowner) needs to be realized. Yet in order to achieve this vision the beneficiaries need the help that can be provided by civil society, or, better, civil society working in some concert with the state. A critical factor, therefore, is forming and strengthening farmers organizations and popular movements to address the concerns they now face as landowners. People's organizations need to be empowered as a

group and as individuals through training and technical support that might be provided by NGOs. These organizations also need to be vigilant to protect against forces that would co-opt or reverse the reform.

There are also arguments coming mainly from scholars of land matters in Africa that land reform may destroy civil society organizations focussed on common property that have existed for centuries. Salih (1999) argues that land tenure reformism imposed agrarian distortions upon previously well-functioning agrarian systems that had clear and manageable customary land tenure regimes. He also argues that the attitudes of the independent African states towards land reform have been influenced by ideology rather than by consistent land policies. For example: “During the Cold War, the division of Africa into countries under socialist or capitalist influence meant that the colonial experience was further complicated by externally-driven ideological alliances. Rhetoric and ideology gave rise to the polemics of collectivism, peasant associations and villagization in (ex-)socialist African countries (Ethiopia, Congo, Tanzania, Niger, Somalia and Sudan). There was also a mix of land markets, individual and communal tenure along the ‘capitalist’ path to development (Botswana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda). Salih 1999, p.26)”

Salih concludes, “In some countries, the implementation of land reform policies has brought more problems than existed previously.” He believes that post colonial reforms, by an large, continued colonial regimes which had already concentrated most fertile lands in the hands of a few and the post colonial reforms did little to change this situation. The post colonial reforms justified “the eviction of peasants and pastoralists from their land (Salih 1999, p.28).”

Lately, land privatization with individual titling has become a predominant strategy for increasing farm production in Africa but many argue that policies leading to this goal are simply weakening civil society further. Part and parcel of this strategy is the policy promoting individual land titling and registration. Hernando de Soto (2000) and the Economist(March 31, 2001 pp. 20-22) for example, argue that granting sound property rights are needed as collateral so peasant can obtain loans or divide and bequeath assets and before peasants can do business with strangers. In contrast a number of scholars of Africa(Dickerman, Bruce, Platteau) argue, as Salih(1999, p.34), “... farm from offering a solution, land registration will contribute to an increase in court cases and violent conflicts over rights, and

hence a reduction of security on the part of those who have communal access through local property rights regimes. “

Salih (1999,p. 25) continues, “Title registrations were meant either to serve the interests of the owners of large-scale farming schemes or transnational corporations. The end result has been the alienation of peasants and pastoralists from their traditional cultivable lands, [pastures and water sources, which has in turn resulted in sporadic conflicts...”

One such organization in the Philippines was invigorated in the late 1980s to respond to the slow implementation of the newly minted Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program .

Hoping to speed up the process and aid in the establishment of beneficiaries, the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA) was organized. In turn it initiated a series of consultations among NGOs and People’s Organizations to determine what sort of concerted action could be taken by the PO-NGO community. These conferences resulted in the organization of the Tripartite Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development which sought cooperation between POs, NGOs, and government agencies, especially the one charged with administration of the CARP (the Department of Agrarian Reform or DAR) . In cooperation the new organization had three goals 1) Ensuring the fast-tracking of the land reform process; 2) Managing and sustaining a viable autonomous organization through training and education among beneficiaries; 3) improving the productivity of the newly acquired land by introducing appropriate technologies and by providing support services. As of 1996 TriPARRD covered four provinces and involved 57 POs 15 NGOs and various governmental entities concerned with CARP implementation.

Some basic operating principles that have emerged from case studies of the operation of TriPARRD (PhilDHRRA and Center for Community Services, 1997) are:

- 1) The goals of the organization would be expedited through the cooperation of the POs and the NGOs who would learn the proper government channels through which decisions were made and services administered. Pressure could help to overcome governmental inefficiencies and facilitate administrative action.

- 2) New tools could be developed for promoting transparency of land assignment such as developing tracking mechanisms for monitoring the progress of claim folders.
- 3) Through organization and cooperation of the tripartite group the legitimacy of land claims could be verified.
- 4) When joint action occurred, the claims of contending landlords could be countered.
- 5) If there was a history of organization on the farm, the tripartite method of grouping the beneficiaries in their own defense was often easier. But when non-legitimate beneficiaries were also organized, it was more difficult. Rural Philippines is no stranger to organizing work. In the early seventies the Marcos regime sponsored numerous such efforts, but many of these did not survive. In the late seventies and eighties NGOs and the church organized rural groups and the post-EDSA period was marked by the tripartism described earlier.
- 6) Organizational strategies differ from community to community depending on the culture of the area and past organizing experience. This calls for a pragmatic approach for which the NGO is able to share some of its experience with the PO that needs to adopt it to local conditions.
- 7) It is easiest to organize beneficiaries when they realize that they get something out of the process quite soon. Agrarian reform beneficiary screening begins with the appointment of a screening committee composed of representatives of NGOs, village (barangay) residents, the barangay council, the barangay agrarian reform committee and the group of potential beneficiaries. Once the beneficiaries are named the NGO helps them in the formation of an agrarian reform beneficiary organization. Land valuation and the awarding of a certificate of land ownership follows.
- 8) NGOs employ an “entry point strategy” to interest the beneficiaries in organizing themselves. For this purpose, establishing a health clinic has been a useful way in which the NGOs have won the trust of the group of beneficiaries. Pin pointing the special needs of groups of beneficiaries in order to arrive at an entry point strategy is one of the early duties of the NGO.
- 9) The goal is for the NGO to phase out its participation as the beneficiary association reaches self governance and maturity. Autonomy from the NGO after a vibrant, self-reliant, and sustainable organization is formed is purpose of NGO activity.
- 10) Unlike the top-down government-organized rural organizations sponsored by the Marcos regime, the present effort emphasizes a grassroots approach. While the approach does not obviate the need for mobilizing

government resources, it does attempt to fill the gaps left by state inaction or omission.

- 11) Building capability—including inter alia the needed technical, leadership, mediation and negotiation, managerial, and accounting skill on the part of the beneficiaries—is the overall purpose of the organization and its cooperation with the NGO.
- 12) When agrarian reform beneficiaries have been named and organized but the landlord does not leave, land occupation or other more militant and extra-legal may be utilized by the nascent organization.

Vibrant and resilient civil society organizations representing solidarity among the beneficiaries themselves or NGOs working with them have undertaken some of these important tasks of governance and management. But their success is strongly dependent on level of commitment, determination and organization of those who have received land themselves. Central to the ability of grassroots organizations to work with NGOs is the essential nature of beneficiary participation to the success of the effort. While there is no universally agreed on definition of the term, it is clear that from the planning stages to evaluation, beneficiaries must play an active role. The shortcomings of NGOs that attempt to act in a paternalistic or authoritarian manner is now quite well documented (Herbinger et al, 1999). In this instance beneficiaries come to feel they have little stake in the outcomes of the development effort.

After an unsuccessful experience with top-down planning, in 1992 the World Food Program in Ethiopia introduced Local Level Participatory Planning (LLPP) which involves a fortuitous collaboration between government workers, the WFP, and grassroots organizations. The efforts of LLPP aim at involving participants from project identification to completion. The project is highly relevant to agrarian reform beneficiaries in that it “builds on the concept of farming systems and recognition of the need to integrate water development, rural infrastructure construction and soil conservation together with agronomic measures—agroforestry, silvipasture, and livestock production (Herbinger, 1999 et al, pp.5-6). Essential to the unfolding of the plan is a general assembly meeting at which LLPP is explained. Subsequently an elected sub committee carries out an initial socio-economic survey. This is essentially a problem identification exercise from which a prioritized list of activities meant to solve these problems emerges. The end result is an agreed upon community

development plan which includes targets to be reached, inputs needed and work plans. At each stage of the process community agreement is solicited and obtained.

This type of planning is intensive in terms of staff time required and resources required, particularly in its early stages. It takes time for state employees and NGO representatives to organize meeting with farmers, talk to them, and after years of top down planning win their trust (Herbinger, 1999, et al, p. 8). Sometimes members re-work their plans in light of present experience an inevitable and desirable outcome. Plans often require follow-up and backstopping, but the payoff should come in more efficient use of community resources and in terms of obtaining more sustainable and lasting benefits for the community. Presumably when this process becomes ingrained in the community and it becomes truly empowered, professional designers and managers can recede into the background.

Most of the benefits of this project accrue to individual farmers on their own plots. Community works are more limited by comparison. For government workers achieving equity in the assignment of benefits is less important than achieving soil and water conservation objectives mainly through the construction of terraces and bunds. These structures have a greater appeal to wealthier members of the community who have the expectation of maintaining or even adding to their holdings. They have least appeal to more land poor farmers who prefer to hold their wealth in animals. This practice has severe implications for environmental protection since the livestock tend to graze on communal hillsides where over-stocking promotes soil erosion. To the extent that technical advice from government development agents is heeded, richer community members tend to be favored. The WPF, in contrast, has equity and poverty eradication as one of its primary goals. While the LLPP approach attempts to involve all economic strata in the community there are important counter-trends based on some differing goals of the actors. Then, too, raising overall expectation of members of the rural community may even increase local conflict (Herbinger, et al 1999,.pp.10-11).

Civil society can help to correct the gender bias often brought to land reform by state institutions. It is often forgotten that women produce 35 to 45 percent of the gross national product of Third World countries and more than 50 percent of staple foods. In Africa they produce more than 80 percent. In spite of that they are among the poorest groups in the population

and are largely excluded from access to land ownership, credit, markets, and education (Hartwig, 2000). Traditionally women in land reform beneficiary families have been regarded as part of the non-active population and have been practically invisible when introducing assistance to rural communities. In some African countries women do not even inherit the land when their husbands die. In Central America the number of women who are given access to land during an agrarian reform is low. In Honduras women represent only 3.8 percent of the beneficiaries. In Nicaragua the number reached 9.4 percent and in El Salvador approximately 11 percent (Mozdzer and Ghimire, 2000).

In most of the agrarian reforms of Latin America in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, women came to control the land parcel only after their husbands had died. In Central America Mozdzer and Ghimire point out that large peasant organizations are recognizing the importance of women as producers and income generators. They cite the Consejo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer Rural (Council for the Integration of the Rural Woman) in Honduras for having achieved a coordinating function in the organized peasant movements while the Federacion de Productoras Agropecuarias (Federation of Women Agricultural Producers) has become an independent organization providing women with credit and marketing services in northern Nicaragua. Koch, et. al, (2000) emphasize the importance of consideration to the gender issue in land reforms in southern Africa. . They claim, “ For agrarian reform to play an effective and sustained role in alleviating poverty, however, it needs to have as its objective the empowerment of the previously dispossessed. Any comprehensive land programme needs to consider the role of marginalized groups. Women tend to play a critical role, especially in the context of the migrant labour systems that have been created through the history of land dispossession in southern Africa, in the survival strategies of impoverished rural families. Thus land reform, and forms of productive growth on the land that are encouraged by it, need to pay a particular role on the position of women. A coherent social agenda is required which understands the complexity of gender relations and which addresses all aspects of the lives of rural women: not only access to the land, but also inheritance laws, tenure arrangements, political and traditional authority, and the role of the household in agricultural production.” (p. 90)

Hartwig documents that there are many self-help women’s groups that have sprung up in the last 25 to 30- years working in the area of rural

development. Rural women are confronted in particular by the problem that their husbands are no longer able or willing to work or are hiring out to do work elsewhere. Women are increasingly called upon to earn money to feed their children and finance their education. Sometimes the women work jointly in the fields. At other times they organize savings and loan projects. A wide variety of these exist. For example, amounts of money can be paid in voluntarily which are then paid out to other group members as interest-bearing loans. At the end of the year or when it comes time to pay for children's books or to purchase inputs the interest is paid out according to the deposits made. Whatever has been saved is protected from access by the husband. Sometimes the women operate small cooperative shops offering everyday consumption items. A significant part of women's group efforts are aimed at easing the workload involved in processing products. They may operate corn, cassava or oil mills that they have purchased as a group. Hartwig also reports, " Sometimes the women also decide to venture into new land and enter a domain traditionally reserved to the men. They try their hands at cooperative livestock farming or at vegetable growing exclusively as cash crops for the market. In the northwest of Cameroon, several groups successfully started to run small oil-palm plantations independently and were ultimately able to profit themselves from palm oil production and marketing." (p. 32)

Empowerment of women varies greatly in the underdeveloped world.. In India women contribute about 70 to 80 percent of total labor in the fragile inaccessible and marginal hills because seasonal male migration from the hills to seek work elsewhere for supplementing family income is common. But the decision making process is still male dominant, so there is often a void in the process which may hamstring managerial functions for a long while. On the other hand, because of land inheritance to the youngest daughter, women are more empowered in the northeastern hills. The case of Kerela is similar. Enterprise and marketing by women is more common in the northeastern hills when compared to the central and western Himalayas. Women are also more empowered in the hills of UP where the polyandry system is prevalent. Samra reports that participation of women in small production systems such as raising of nurseries, apiculture, silk worm raising, dairy and in credit and thrift societies is superior to that of men (Samra, 1999, p. 433).

Women have come into prominence as a development actor through rural micro credit programs like that of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh of

which a great deal has been written. Entering “micro finance” into the search engine of the World Bank’s internet address yields 300 entries. Since most rural micro credit schemes in the Third World are based on the experience of the Grameen Bank, Mayfield (1998) has distilled nine “lessons Learnt” from years of experience:

1. Successful programs offer small loans usually less than \$100 in the beginning. Larger loans are offered after borrowers have developed the skills, discipline, and commitment needed for success.
2. Successful programs make loans mainly to women, who are much more committed than men to using the loans for the benefit of their families. They also have a stronger commitment to repay in order to qualify for larger loans in the future.
3. Successful programs insist that women be organized into groups of five with each member guaranteeing the payment of each other member.
4. Successful programs insist that payments be made on a weekly basis, thus helping to build discipline and consistency. Weekly payments on small loans over a period of 52 weeks also ensure that the payments required each week are small enough so that if one person cannot pay in a given week, the others would be able to make the payment for her.
5. Successful programs provide loans to the poorest of the poor because these women have no other alternatives so they are much more committed to repaying their loans.
6. Successful programs require all borrowers to put some amount of money into a savings account each week that will earn interest. Establishing these accounts appears to strengthen the borrowers’ commitment to the program and helps to build their sense of discipline, self-esteem and well-being.
7. Successful programs charge an appropriate rate of interest, but much less than a money lender would require.: This real interest charge is generally between 2-3 percent a month, just enough to pay the salaries of the bank workers supervising the program in their area.
8. Successful programs generally hire people with a business or banking background to be a village bank worker in which borrowers are clients and not beneficiaries.
9. Successful programs develop a strong commitment to meet with the borrowers every week on a regular schedule, to give training in literacy, health, and community development, in addition to training in accounting, marketing , and entrepreneurial skills.

Credit is a prime need of agrarian reform beneficiaries in order to be able to purchase the inputs necessary for productive farming. The agrarian reforms

in Japan, Taiwan and the Republic of Korea recognized this need and as tenants were converted to owners usually on the same plot they farmed before the reform, credit was provided and production rose. In the Philippines, in contrast, the same reform process (albeit on a much smaller scale) is occurring but credit is not forthcoming and the production results are not salutary. NGOs can be instrumental in aiding beneficiaries obtain credit as the well-known experience of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh illustrates. The idea of micro-credit has spread in the last decade or so to many other countries. Some countries, as Cameroon, has a very long history of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). In Cameroon the formal financial system has been unable to satisfy the needs of the population and now members of ROSCAs prefer them to borrowing from the formal system even when they are able to do so. A ROSCA is an association formed of a core of participants who agree to regularly pay a certain amount of money to a fund, from which short term interest-bearing loans are made which, in turn is distributed entirely or partially to each participant. Preference for ROSCAs comes from the fact that savers in the system can receive opportune credit in times of financial need among other advantages stemming from group solidarity, flexibility, absence of the need to mortgage property, speed of operations, low management costs, and equity (Tchuidjo, 1990).

In contrast, a very recent model featuring self-help groups that are linked to state and commercial banks, sometimes without the intermediation of NGOs, dominate the Indian micro finance scene. The self-help groups are voluntary associations of people organized to achieve social and economic goals. As Shete (1999) claims, “The Indian micro finance is unique as it uses the formal financial institutions in providing finance to SHGs instead of creating parallel non-formal channels of routing finance to the poor (p. 475)”. Shete reports that while having fairly high transaction costs banks are able to realize satisfactory levels of profitability. This type of micro finance is able to reach larger numbers of rural poor than any scheme attempted previously who can benefit from financial services such as credit, savings, and insurance. While the program has been in operation for only a decade, repayment on loans nears 100 percent., according to Shete.

The story is quite different for small farmers in Melanesia. In Papua New Guinea, for example, there are no financial services for rural people. It is unprofitable for banks to operate in sparsely populated and often remote rural districts. Rural people have little life experience in business.

According to Kopunye et al, (1999) rural people “are considered to be both poor savers and bad loan risks. Traditional systems...of land tenure have made it impossible for banks to obtain their conventional loan collateral. Communication is extremely difficult and transaction costs are high. Problems of law and order raise security risks beyond acceptable limits (p. 15).” A Federation of Savings and Loan Societies founded during the colonial period failed when independence came for a variety of reasons and “ people lost a considerable amount of money and there is much apprehensiveness about having the experience repeated (p. 15).”

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