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LAND, VIOLENT CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT

By Nicolas Pons-Vignon and Henri-Bernard Solignac Lecomte

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AsDB	Asian Development Bank
CERDI	Centre d’Études et de Recherches sur le Développement International
CPDC	Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation network of the DAC
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DCD	Development Co-operation Directorate (<i>the Secretariat of the OECD DAC</i>)
DFID	Department for International Development of the United Kingdom
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (Germany)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Brazil)
NALEDI	National Labour and Economic Development Institute (South Africa)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (London)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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The opinions expressed in this paper however remain the authors', and any error should be attributed to them only.

FOREWORD

On 19-20 June 2003, responding to a proposal of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the OECD Development Centre and the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate organised an informal experts' seminar in Paris on "Land, Conflict and Development", in order to:

- i) examine the links between land and conflict;
- ii) help formulate preliminary proposals on how donors can best incorporate land issues in their policy frameworks for the management and mitigation of conflict; and
- iii) propose next steps to advance this agenda further.

On the occasion of the seminar, the OECD hosted the European launch of the World Bank's 2003 Policy Research Report on *Land Policy for Growth and Poverty Reduction*, itself the result of wide consultation and dialogue. This, and the Guidelines of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*, provided the policy frameworks against which the debates took place. In addition, the seminar benefited from the participation of several members of the European Union Task Force on *EU Guidelines on Land Tenure*, which held its meeting on the previous day in Paris.

In order to help focus the discussions, the Development Centre and USAID commissioned an issues paper, prepared by Professor Jean-Louis Arcand from the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Développement International* (CERDI) and Nicolas Pons-Vignon, a consultant for the OECD Development Centre. Leading remarks by Mark Berman, Chairman of the Conflict, Peace and Co-operation Development Network of the DAC, and comments by Klaus Deininger, co-ordinator of the World Bank Policy Research Report on Land Policy, provided background and orientation for the discussion. No other formal presentations were made. The group engaged in a structured roundtable discussion on the implications of the complex relationship between land and conflict for development assistance. Details about the workshop can be found at www.oecd.org/dev/land.

This paper draws from the original issues document prepared ahead of the seminar, as well as from the very fruitful discussions which took place. It attempts to contribute to the ongoing reflection on how to better integrate land policy and conflict prevention and mitigation by proposing steps towards a unified policy framework. The paper also seeks to articulate preliminary recommendations for donor agencies, which will have to be further explored through research and dialogue.

PREFACE

On June 19th and 20th 2003, a group of economists, sociologists, political scientists, lawyers, representatives of donor agencies and civil society organisations participated in a seminar on “Land, Conflict and Development” at the OECD in Paris. One primary aim of the organisers — the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the OECD Development Centre and the Secretariat of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) — was to bring together experts and practitioners from two areas which had until then seldom confronted their perspectives: from land policy on the one hand, and from conflict prevention and resolution on the other hand.

Together, they explored the role of land issues in sparking, worsening or mitigating conflicts, and sought to draw policy implications for aid donors. The discussion was intense, and represented an important step towards a deeper understanding of the issues. On some of them, a consensus emerged, confirming the relevance of a multi-disciplinary approach to encompass their more complex aspects. On other issues, divergences underlined the need for further analysis and debate. This should not be regarded as a failure: land and conflict are two fields which, in research, rarely intersect. Since the very opposite is true in practice, the task ahead is considerable. Eventually, a number of preliminary policy recommendations emerged which were presented to the Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation (CPDC) network of the DAC at its October 2003 meeting in Brussels.

By incorporating those analyses and recommendations into a critical review of the relevant literatures, this paper provides policy makers with *i)* a state-of-the-art overview of the land-related dynamics of violent conflict, and *ii)* a preliminary version of what may ultimately constitute a coherent framework to integrate land policy in their conflict prevention and resolution programmes.

As emphasised during the seminar by Mark Berman — then acting Chair of the CPDC network — donor agencies are aware that land issues are a vital element of sustainable peace. Indeed, the DAC Guidelines on *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* refer to land as one of the root causes of violent conflict. He noted, however, that these “bookmarks” called for more in-depth analysis and, importantly, discussion of solutions.

Coming from the land policy perspective, Klaus Deininger, co-ordinator of the World Bank's 2003 Policy Research Report on *Land Policy for Growth and Poverty Reduction* observed that the growing awareness of the specific role land can play in preventing — or triggering — violence has translated into important evolutions, but still remains to be fully mapped out.

This paper contributes to filling these gaps, and provides policy makers with useful directions on how to promote peace and development by better integrating land policy and conflict prevention.

Prof. Louka T. Katseli
Director
OECD Development Centre
12 February 2004

RÉSUMÉ

Les dynamiques foncières sont en mutation permanente et s'inscrivent dans des contextes spécifiques. S'il est vrai qu'elles provoquent des conflits, ceux-ci ne deviennent pas systématiquement violents. Pour mieux comprendre les liens entre terre et conflit, on peut s'intéresser aux structures de pouvoir qui gouvernent la gestion des ressources naturelles : leur transformation est en effet une étape nécessaire à l'amélioration de l'efficacité économique de l'agriculture et à la réduction des inégalités. Parce qu'elle menace les intérêts dominants, une telle transformation provoque toujours des conflits d'intensité variable. Or la question foncière est au cœur de ces conflits, à cause des valeurs économique et symbolique attachées à la terre. A cet égard, deux enseignements peuvent être retenus : d'une part, quelle que soit leur origine, les conflits dans les sociétés rurales affectent profondément les systèmes fonciers ; d'autre part, qu'elles soient à l'origine du conflit ou qu'elles en deviennent l'otage, les questions foncières requièrent une approche très prudente de la part des décideurs politiques car elles sont un élément central de l'évolution des sociétés. Ainsi, les politiques foncières ne sauraient être considérées comme « neutres » en matière de prévention des conflits. Dès lors, les bailleurs de fonds cherchant à promouvoir la paix et le développement doivent s'attaquer de façon plus systématique, plus rigoureuse et plus cohérente aux problèmes fonciers dans les pays récipiendaires. Inversement, les politiques foncières doivent impérativement tenir compte des sensibilités et des antagonismes, de façon à contenir les risques de conflit violent.

SUMMARY

Land dynamics are context specific and rapidly changing, and conflicts related to them do not systematically escalate into violence. One way of framing the discussion is to consider change in the structures of power governing the management of resources in rural areas as necessary to achieve greater efficiency and equity. Since such change will be opposed by beneficiaries of the system in place, the transformation of agriculture is bound to be marred by conflicts of various intensity levels. At the heart of these conflicts lies land because of its very high material *and* symbolic values. Evidence shows that (a) whether they result from pre-existing agrarian tensions or not, conflict situations in rural societies deeply affect the politics of land, and (b) whether it is at the heart of a conflict or gets dragged into it, land requires a careful approach by policy makers because it is a central element in the evolution of societies. As a result, policies pertaining to land can hardly be “neutral” in terms of conflict management. Donors seeking to promote peace and development should therefore tackle land issues in recipient countries more systematically, more carefully and in a more coherent manner. Conversely, land policy should carefully take sensitivities and grievances into account, in order to better monitor the risks of violent conflict.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Capturing the Dynamics between Land and Conflict

- It is difficult to establish the role that land issues play in the outbreak of conflict; although they are often embroiled in conflict situations, they rarely seem to be *the* cause of violence.
- However, specific dynamics are associated with the development of agriculture, and the way agrarian structures of power react to these dynamics can be a source of conflict. Where the transition to market-driven agriculture fails to generate opportunities for rural dwellers (either in rural or urban areas), tensions may build up and lay fertile ground for violence. Such tensions usually result from an incomplete transformation of agriculture, and can be linked to the failure to deliver either “equity” (e.g. when some groups are left out of redistribution processes) or “efficiency” (e.g. where the transition adversely impacts production).
- For rural as well as urban or semi-urban dwellers, land holds both very high material *and* symbolic — even emotional — values. Under the influence of “political entrepreneurs”, it can therefore easily be turned into *a tangible object of dispute*, potentially leading to violent conflict. In situations characterised by a lack of opportunities — rather than by poverty or inequality *per se* — dispossessed or frustrated groups are all the more likely to be vulnerable to such manoeuvring, especially when it leads them to believe that there cannot be any negotiated solution to their plight.
- In such cases, land eventually comes to play a central role, as it increases the economic profitability of violence while providing a political justification for it. In the absence of efficient mediating institutions or livelihood sources other than related to land, “land-related” conflict may thus emerge in rural, but also in urban or peri-urban areas.
- In turn, such conflicts are a fairly “predictable” source of future, typically more violent, clashes over land, as expropriations and related brutality generate new grievances.

How Can Land Policy Help to Mitigate Conflict?

- Good land policy helps to generate economic growth and sustain peace in the long run. Supporting the transition to market-driven agriculture is necessary, but should be acknowledged as a primarily political process.

- However, the potential role of land policy in preventing conflicts in the short- and medium-term remains insufficiently documented, thus preventing the formulation of clear-cut policy prescriptions at this stage. Still it may safely be said that once land has become a key political issue at the outbreak of conflict, failure to tackle it straight away can impede the chances of achieving a lasting peace.
- Conversely, if properly handled, land policy can play a critical, “positive” role within strategies aimed at consolidating peace in areas emerging from conflict, by ensuring that long-lasting grievances are not sharpened. This may imply the implementation of complementary policies such as the following:
 - i) *Property Commissions (or Claims Commissions)* can play a leading part in processes of reconciliation and property restitution, by facilitating dialogue and data collection — potentially including “conflict proneness” indicators — while dealing with competing claims, resettlement and compensation in the aftermath of conflicts involving mass population displacements. Promising cases, including Cyprus and to some extent Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggest that massive and sustained donor intervention is a key factor of success.
 - ii) *Comprehensive dialogue programmes* can help to resolve enduring land disputes which would otherwise degenerate into fighting, and can pave the way for acceptable institutional reforms. It must be stressed, however, that failing to carry out such dialogue programmes to completion can prove counter-productive by depriving stakeholders of a fragile mutual trust.
 - iii) *Investment in agricultural infrastructure* in post-conflict settings can complement land policy by creating new income-generating opportunities. Fostering agricultural productivity and production will prevent the outbreak of food crises, and create employment and other economic opportunities for demobilised war veterans.
- Although they can be a useful tool for coping with claims threatening to escalate into conflict, *land reforms* have themselves often been a source of violence and frustration. This can be the case where dispossessed groups retaliate (as in Chile in the 1970s), or where land reform raises expectations it does not meet — in particular when economic performance actually deteriorates as a result of the reform (e.g. Zimbabwe in the late 1990s). If it is to sustain peace, land reform must succeed both in meeting claims *and* in enhancing agricultural growth. Supporting new farmers to ensure their economic viability is hence essential.
- Land is not the only asset which could be redistributed to appease tensions – especially when excessive redistribution may lead to poor agricultural performance. In cases where alternatives to the dismantling of efficient large farms are needed, or where land is conspicuously too scarce to be redistributed on a large scale (e.g. in South Asia), other redistributive strategies can meet claims without jeopardising peace and growth. These may include job creation linked to investment in agricultural infrastructure as well as staple food price policies.

- Secured land tenure rights can foster economic efficiency and environmental sustainability. They also have positive implications for peace in the long run. However, land tenure reform aimed at establishing private property rights is a highly political process which cannot be approached as a merely technical exercise.
- In determining the most appropriate forms of rights registration (customary vs. “modern”), a pragmatic, mixed approach, not necessarily relying on “official” registration, may be more efficient than trusting “traditional” systems or trying to supersede them by new ones, particularly in the context of a brewing or ending conflict.

Renewing Donors’ Approaches and Tools

- Preliminary analysis suggests that donors’ conflict-prevention programmes aiming to sustain peace in immediate post-conflict settings tend to neglect land issues (e.g. in Afghanistan). They usually either fail to comprehend the potential role of land policy in paving the way for reconciliation and renewed growth, or tend to see it is a relevant, but long-term issue. Achieving political stability with early visible results is essential.
- Similarly, land policy projects often neglect the conflict dimension. While an efficient land policy promoting agricultural development is important for securing peace in the long run, its “traditional” prescriptions are insufficient to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict. Donors should therefore avoid strictly technical approaches, and pay attention early on to the political dynamics that may impede the implementation of their institution-building programmes.
- This requires that they invest in understanding the local political context of their intervention (e.g. how government institutions fit into the “taking-sides” equation), as well as in assessing the impact of their own aid and other policies in that context. For instance, if not carefully designed, interventions aimed at crisis mitigation and especially post-crisis reconstruction — such as agricultural revitalisation, resettling of refugees, etc. — may inadvertently exacerbate or create a land-related conflict. The inclusion of “Political Impact Assessment” documents in project cycles could be a step in that direction.
- Donors should improve their ability to monitor potential land-incited conflict and to look for often-unheeded early warning signs; land issues should always be included in assessments of pre- and post-conflict vulnerabilities; a “do no harm” checklist should be developed for project implementation in post-conflict reconstruction.
- Better *co-ordination* among and within donor agencies is crucial, and requires that they combine traditionally separate programmatic domains (e.g. economic growth, governance, and rural development). While the benefits of co-ordination in lessening violence can be established from cases such as Cambodia, designing conflict management and land policy strategies separately makes it harder to address the “roots” of conflicts, and to prepare the ground for sustained peace.

“Political Impact Assessments” could be used to identify areas where co-ordination is most needed in order to prevent counter-effects. Land usually ranks high among sensitive areas, and it may be useful to adopt a single “focal point for land”, especially in post-peace accord settings, in order to co-ordinate all land-related aspects of interventions.

- *Best practices* to deal with open or latent political conflicts include participatory approaches and comprehensive stakeholder dialogue, which can help frame a consensual policy agenda on land administration. Donors need to consider taking more risk in engaging all stakeholders in land related conflicts, as they do in helping to resolve broader conflicts.

Research Priorities and Next Steps

Inadequate research methodologies partly explain why we still know fairly little about the dynamics that link land issues to violent conflict. The following suggestions could prove equally useful for both “land” and “conflict” practitioners, and help improve the efficiency of donor policies in the land and conflict area:

- In order to help understand better the dynamics of rural land and conflict, comparative studies of the link between the dynamics of agrarian structure, categorical inequality and violent conflict should attempt to contrast the situations of a limited number of countries sharing similar characteristics, but different evolutions.
- Research on the politics of land is often essential to understand the mechanisms that lead to conflict. In order to design their policies better, donors could improve their political assessment frameworks by paying specific attention to rural and urban land issues.
- The specific gender dynamics of land-related conflicts deserve to be explored in depth. Much of the existing literature focuses on differential conditions of access to land and labour, but lacks a conflict lens.
- *Early-warning indicators* and tools for assessing vulnerability to land-related conflict should also pay special attention to the politics of land in order to better anticipate related conflicts.
- Research into the benefits that could accrue from greater *policy coherence* may focus on:
 - i) the impact of limited market access for agricultural exports of developing countries on the livelihoods of farmers and farm workers, and the potential link with grievances and violent conflict;
 - ii) the effect of changes in global commodity chains on the patterns of land use, and the related potential tensions;
 - iii) the dynamics of violence involving local populations (including workers) in areas host to foreign enterprise investment. For instance, it would be useful to explore, from a land perspective, the knowledge and experience accumulated

by initiatives of tri-sector partnerships between firms, civil society and governments in mitigating the negative environmental and social impact of foreign direct investment, and maximising its development benefits through negotiation.

- In order to help foster effective participation by stakeholder groups, future research should gather best practice in supporting the creation of pro-poor and pro-development coalitions, so as to mitigate land-related conflicts and bring about long-term and widely supported solutions.
- Help devise new evaluation methods for conflict resolution projects that take account of long term aspects, as a move away from delivery-based evaluations (which tend to foster a short-term perspective).
- Further research should be dedicated to ways of generating a more harmonised approach to resettlement in post-peace accord settings, in particular through an analysis of the operation of Property Commissions. More generally, it could also attempt to work out the implications of the DAC work on the harmonisation of donor practices (OECD, 2003*b*) for policies related to land and conflict.
- A review of donor practices affecting the interaction between land issues and conflict in partner countries remains to be conducted.
- Study alternative redistributive policies in contexts where land reform is not feasible, for example because of the scarcity of arable land.

As a follow up to the seminar, the following next steps may be considered:

- Developing a toolkit to help practitioners in donor agencies, both in capitals and in the field, grasp the complex links between land and conflict issues.
- Forming a human resource network — possibly developing from the group of participants in the OECD/USAID seminar on “Land, Conflict and Development” and including invited experts who could not attend — in order to continue examining the ways in which donor policies with regard to land issues can become more conducive to peace.

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the end of the Cold War, and under the influence of the United Nations and the DAC, donor agencies have been broadening the scope of conflict resolution programmes in order to build sustained peace. As a result of this evolution, traditional “relief” projects have had to preoccupy themselves increasingly with long term development in order to *prevent* the reappearance of conflict by addressing structural issues. The new practice of conflict prevention also entails consequences for the development community, which has been asked to contribute to the mitigation of — even potential — conflicts.

Widespread violence and insecurity deprives most conflict-stricken countries from growth and development prospects. Another reason the development community adopted a conflict prevention agenda is linked to the evolution of conflicts since 1989. Groups responsible for violence are less identifiable with clear, united state apparatuses than they were previously. While conflicts involving several states are still common, they tend to be rather “trans-regional” than interstate *per se*, with a few important exceptions (such as the Ethiopia/Eritrea conflict that began in the late 1990s). As a result, diplomatic or other pressures directed at state administrations are unlikely to be sufficient to achieve lasting peace.

While researchers and policy makers from different backgrounds have focused on a number of “non interstate” dynamics of violent conflict — such as small arms trafficking or ethnic fractionalisation — a number of central social, economic and political dynamics conditioning conflict seem to be missing from the debate. Most crucially, while some of the frameworks informing development policies acknowledge that donors are not neutral actors, their impact is often poorly monitored in practice. Apart from the success or failure in achieving the aims of the projects themselves, donor involvement may have a deep effect on local politics, modifying the balance of power at various levels, sometimes for the worse¹.

The prevention of conflicts features increasingly at the core of donor development assistance programmes, as exemplified by the development co-operation policy statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands:

“Stability and development are so closely interwoven that it is not possible to work on them separately. The fight against poverty is more effective in combination with (...) diplomacy, dialogue, conflict prevention and peace building”².

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1. See, for example, Storey (1999) on the impact of Structural Adjustment Policies on ethnic tensions in Rwanda.
 2. See Website of the Ministry: <http://www.minbuza.nl/>.

Although the scope of each category of development programme (e.g. rural development, education, or enterprise development) is broadening continuously to accommodate new preoccupations, those responsible for designing and implementing them, within academia or donor agencies, do not systematically exchange their views and experience. In the area of conflict prevention and resolution, participants in the OECD/USAID seminar on “Land, Conflict and Development” agreed that the issues at stake urgently call for an open and result-driven co-ordination.

Although land plays a crucial role in processes of economic development and human and social reproduction, we know so far very little about the actual dynamics that link land to conflict, be it in a context marked by donor intervention or not. While it would be far too simple to state that “land causes conflict” (say, where it is unevenly shared), simply dismissing its role because it is unclear would be equally misleading. Two recent attempts by donors to grasp the dynamics of land-related tensions escalating into violent conflict have irrigated this paper. The DAC *Guidelines on Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (OECD, 2001), is written from the perspective of conflict prevention and looks, among other issues, at environmental pressure, while the World Bank’s Policy Research Report on *Land Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction* (World Bank, 2003) uses land policy expertise to identify ways to reduce the incidence and impact of conflicts. The interaction of the land policy and conflict prevention perspectives during the seminar was very positive as each contributed to broaden the other’s scope: the “conflict” lens requires considering issues of power and the balance of forces, while the concern of land policy with long-term development is essential for sustaining peace.

Based on the pooling of complementary expertise and experience³, this paper reviews what has been learnt so far about the land and conflict link (Sections II and III) and the scope for land policy to prevent violent conflict (Section IV). At an equally important level, what is *not* known well is also examined, as well as ways to learn more. Where the ground seems firm enough, preliminary policy-relevant recommendations are formulated on how donors may support the use of land policy to secure peace in developing countries (Section V).

3. The paper is based on a review of the literature as well as on the record of discussions at the OECD/USAID informal experts’ seminar on “Land, Conflict and Development” held in June 2003 in Paris.

II. THE DETERMINANTS OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Apart from pioneer work from the 1960s and 1970s, the interest of economists in analysing the *causes* of violent conflict is fairly recent⁴. Their main findings, which mostly pertain to civil strife, can be summarised as follows: the two clearest factors leading to a high probability of violent conflict are the possibility of appropriating economic resources and, to a lesser extent, ethnic fractionalisation⁵. As for the role of foreign aid, its uncertainty increases the probability of outbreak of civil war, but its magnitude has no observed impact (Arcand and Chauvet, 2002)⁶.

A closer review of the macroeconomic literature which attempts to model the determinants of violent conflict — mostly by looking at its links with *inequality* — uncovers few additional certainties, revealing instead stark difficulties in accounting for these dynamics, not least because of the complexity associated with defining and measuring conflict (Box 1). Below, we review the conclusions of the various “families” of this literature and try to derive possible implications for the role of “land” in conflict dynamics.

Box 1. What is Violent Conflict?

- The macro-economic literature devoted to civil war was largely influenced by the important empirical work of Singer and Small (1994), who define conflict as a major *civil war* if it results in at least 1 000 deaths per year and if at least 5 per cent of these victims originate in the groups involved in the conflict. Clearly, many violent conflicts linked to land would not qualify under this restrictive definition.
- However, Brockett (1992) shows how hazardous it is to measure and categorise conflicts. For example, according to established categories, two civil wars may differ more from one another than a given civil war from a trans-national war. Also, in times of violent conflict, data collection is usually impeded or manipulated, thus data reliability should be assessed cautiously. Hence, from a practical point of view, it seems reasonable to adopt a broad definition of conflict, especially since even low-intensity conflict may ultimately result in the outbreak of extreme violence, and should thus not be overlooked.
- A broad definition is adopted in the microeconomic literature: Alston, Libecap and Mueller (2000) define *land-related violent conflict* as “personal injury or death and/or physical property damage in a land dispute”.

4. Conversely, understanding the *effects* of conflicts has long been a major concern for economists.
 5. The upshot, as Deininger (2003) puts it, is that “there is little in terms of outside intervention that can be done to reduce the scope of civil conflict [...] efforts to promote economic development through measures such as better access to markets and infrastructure would appear rather futile.”
 6. A straight forward policy prescription is thus to render aid flows less volatile over time. Development and humanitarian aid practitioners participating in the “Land, Conflict and Development” seminar made the same point. See Section V.

Inequality

The main assumption tested for as a potential and predictable source of violent conflict is the level of inequality within a given society. However, no firm conclusion for policy makers can be drawn from research thus far, because empirical findings and their interpretations greatly diverge. The difficulties associated with “measuring” both inequality and violent conflict are among the main reasons that account for this impasse.

Several quantitative studies have been carried out on the basis of cross-sectional or panel datasets, using various indicators of the incidence of violent conflict. As would be expected given the diversity of the data used in the studies, results are highly contrasted, if not contradictory. One can distinguish between four sets of claims concerning the link between inequality (between individuals) and violent conflict. Three of them find a relationship between the two, but disagree on the trend it follows, which can reflect either:

- i) a linear relationship, i.e. the more unequal a society, the higher the likelihood of the outbreak of conflict (Russett, 1964, Nafziger and Auvinen, 2002, Muller, 1997); or
- ii) a quadratic relationship (U-shaped curve), where the likelihood of conflict is maximised when inequality is either very high or very low. Hirschman (1981) explains this by the existence of a “tolerance for inequality”, which is linked to the prospect of climbing up the social ladder – indicating that there is some threshold (intermediate) level of inequality for which the likelihood of conflict is minimised;
- iii) other authors, by contrast, have found the curve to be an inverted-U (e.g. Nagel, 1974), which means that rising inequality would be conducive to conflict until a certain “peak” level is reached. Beyond this level, possibly because of stronger state repressive capacities, the rise in inequality is associated with a *declining* risk of violent conflict.

Conversely, much of the more recent economic research simply concludes that:

- iv) *no* firm conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of available data as far as the relationship between inequality and conflict is concerned (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier, 2000).

Another factor that undermines confidence both in the data and in the underlying theoretical models is the contradictory interpretation of the *same* dataset, namely the 1996 Deininger and Squire dataset on income inequality. While Fearon and Laitin (2003) find *no* relationship between conflict and inequality, Nafziger and Auvinen (2002) use the same data to support their claim of a linear relationship. Therefore, and as pointed out by Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) who find no link between inequality in the distribution of land ownership and the probability of outbreak of civil war — a result confirmed with different control variables by Arcand and Chauvet (2002) — there is very little in the macroeconomic literature that allows one to link land dynamics to violent conflict, or formulate concrete policy prescriptions.

Polarisation

One interesting line of (macro) research that considers the link between inequality and conflict uses the concept of “polarisation” (which refers to the constitution of antagonistic groups), introduced by Esteban and Ray (1994, 1999) and extended by Reynal-Querol (2001). In striking contrast with the rest of the literature, they find that more equality may well *increase* the likelihood of conflict.

A situation of polarisation occurs when society is divided into groups that are homogeneous internally and heterogeneous viz. each other. Competing groups seek to impose their preferences — in the model, the choice of the level of a public good furnished to all members of society — through “lobbying” activities. The probability for a given group to succeed is directly proportional to its share in total expenditures on lobbying activities, which are not productive. Esteban and Ray (1999) show that the likelihood of conflict “has a tendency to increase when there are two similar-sized, opposed groups in society”. Similarly, in a three group case, a uniform distribution of the population into the three groups maximises the likelihood of conflict. Although things get far more complicated when a larger number of groups is considered, the general finding is that it is polarisation, rather than inequality (between individuals), that gives rise to conflict (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2003).

Therefore, because it can result in an increase in polarisation, redistribution of land for the sake of achieving a more equal distribution (starting from perfect inequality) may actually aggravate the risk of conflict.

Land and the “Rent-seeking” Argument

In the economics literature, theoretical approaches to violent conflict in general and civil war in particular tend to focus on rent-seeking arguments. Two competing approaches can be distinguished, respectively associated with the work of Herschel Grossman, and with that of Paul Collier. In the former approach, a government and a rebel movement, both of whom are kleptocrats, attempt to gain control of the resources of the state (Addison *et al.*, 2000; Azam, 1995; Grossman, 1991, 1992, 1999, and Gershenson and Grossman, 2000). Since they each maximise their expected payoffs, net of the cost of engaging in conflict, the larger the potential pie to be won, the greater the incentive to engage in warfare. In Grossman’s model, this leads to the rather unpalatable conclusion that conflict is more likely in richer countries, although Arcand and Chauvet (2002) have shown that this result can be overturned by a more careful specification of the underlying hypotheses. The second approach was developed by Collier (2000) and Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2001). Rebels are no longer motivated by the desire to appropriate the resources of the state, but rather bent on ensuring their survival by securing the rents that accrue from controlling primary commodity exports. Rent-seeking does not spur rebellion, it is the very condition for its survival:

“The rebel objective is to loot natural resource rents on a continuing basis. Victory over the government is not an objective, and so conflict is treated as an equilibrium phenomenon” (Collier, *op. cit.*)

Land issues have not been formally included in these models. *A priori*, the Grossman-type of rent seeking models predicts that more firmly established property rights over land would make it easier for rebels to extort resources from peasants and should therefore be a source of increasing conflict. The same effect would occur from the government having stronger incentives to protect its turf. In contrast, Collier-type models — in which “grievance” arguments facilitate the maintenance of a state of insecurity that allows rebels to engage in their equilibrium rent-seeking activities — would predict the contrary: more firmly established property rights over land should increase the opportunity cost of recruiting rebel fighters and reduce the scope for violent conflict⁷.

Microeconomic Analysis

Some authors argue that the heterogeneity of empirical findings, which renders their use for purposes of policy design hazardous, is partly due to the difficulty in comparing indicators of inequality on a cross-country basis (Cramer, 2002). Inequality is essentially a *relative* phenomenon, thus it is hardly surprising that the diversity of a society cannot be adequately captured by a Gini coefficient, and making comparisons on a trans-national basis is even more problematic. Doubts may also be raised concerning the validity of general indicators of the “level of conflict”, as pointed out by Brockett (1992). As Cramer puts it:

“Data problems are especially intense in this [inequality and conflict] field of research, given the shortcomings and lack of comparability in much data from developing countries and given the consequences of violent political conflict for the collection of reliable data” (*op. cit.*).

Micro-level analysis may fill the gaps in our knowledge by considering the broad spectrum of history and socio-political relations, as illustrated by the work of André and Platteau (1998) on the factors that led to the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Box 2). However, most case studies focus on a single country. Adopting a comparative perspective would enrich the understanding of social dynamics in various contexts.

Box 2. Land-related Tensions and the Rwandan Genocide: Not the Cause, but Possibly an Aggravating Factor

The case of Rwanda is a particularly stark illustration of the link between inequality in the distribution of land assets and the outbreak of conflict. According to Storey (1999) and André and Platteau (1998), Rwanda was characterised, before the civil strife of 1994 that eventually led to the genocide, by an ethnic division of labour in *urban* areas inherited from the colonial regime: Tutsis were allegedly over-represented in the private sector because of their difficulties in accessing public jobs. This phenomenon was actually rather less marked in reality, although Hutu control over the state apparatus was undeniable. Hence, as Storey puts it: “a structural adjustment programme which explicitly sought to tilt the balance of the economy away from the state and towards the private sector was very likely to be interpreted in ethnic terms” (1999).

According to André and Platteau, this urban-based rivalry, sharpened by the effects of structural adjustment, is the main reason for the outbreak of civil strife in 1994. However, the situation in rural areas, characterised by fierce competition for land but no ethnic-based inequality, played a key role in turning a low-level conflict into genocide. Interestingly, one of the cases documented by those authors in Northern Rwanda confirms the link between prior land disputes and mass killings, and contradicts the ethnic argument – both the killers and their victims were Hutus.

One lesson here is that land inequality is not necessarily a source of conflict, but that it can be an aggravating factor when associated with extreme poverty and vanishing opportunities.

7. At the time of writing this paper, the World Bank was carrying out several case studies to test Paul Collier’s model of civil war.

Political Science and Categorical Inequality

Thus far, econometric analysis has not provided a firm basis for understanding the causes of violent conflict. This is particularly true with regard to the link between inequality and conflict, where land is one determinant of inequality among others, albeit a particularly important one in countries where a large part of the population lives in rural areas. Nevertheless, the fact that empirical research on inequality and conflict has not yielded convincing results does not mean that there is no link. As Cramer puts it:

“Faced with this predicament, some take the view that one can quietly ditch the problem and push an alternative claim about the causes of violent conflict. However, the real implication of such uncertainty has to be the nagging possibility that inequality still might be significant, at least sometimes, to the origins or ‘epidemiology’ of some conflicts” (op. cit).

This “nagging possibility” can perhaps only be explored by looking at what macro empirical studies cannot explain, namely the social dynamics of inequality, which are analysed by political scientists and sociologists. Unlike most of the research mentioned above, they concentrate on inequality between *groups* rather than between *individuals*. Tilly (1999) introduces the notion of *categorical inequality* and focuses on inequality between social pairings (blacks *versus* whites, men *versus* women, large landowners *versus* small holders, etc.) in order to understand the high degree of persistence in inequality. The finding that deeply embedded, and at the same time dynamic, social mechanisms lie at the heart of inequality is not surprising. However, it is worth stressing that inequality is by no means an “accident” of history. On the contrary, buttressing certain forms of inequality has always been central to the protection of dominant groups. In this context,

“redressing (...) inequality is only possible through sustained political action, and in circumstances where the benefits accruing to the beneficiaries from exploitation and/or opportunity hoarding fade and the costs of maintaining the system rise” (Cramer, *op. cit.*).

Thus, inequality between groups might constitute a more appropriate lens to look the roots of violent conflict through than inequality between individuals. While inter-group heterogeneity is common to both polarisation and categorical inequality, the approaches differ on intra-group homogeneity. Polarisation being a model, the extent to which its specifications capture actual social dynamics is crucial to assess its relevance. The analysis of the genocide in Rwanda by André and Platteau (1998) tends to show that “groups” may be too complex and not homogenous enough, to form the basis of a model aiming to predict the outcome of their confrontation⁸.

Although their contribution to analysis remains weak due to the lack of case studies, approaches to violent conflict drawing on political science that focus on categorical inequality may have two advantages over strictly economic ones. First, they consider the relative privileges and frustrations of competing groups within society, while not failing to account for infra-group tensions and possible group reorganisation. Second, and more importantly, they point to a crucial implication for conflict resolution strategies:

8. Their findings indirectly point to the inconsistencies of the polarisation approach, and its assumption of “infra-group homogeneity”, at least when groups are readily defined using such terms as “religion” or “ethnicity”: because such categorisation fails to capture the complexity and multi-dimension of identity patterns, it overestimates the homogeneity of the groups it chooses to observe.

if some conflicts result from an attempt, on the part of groups who feel oppressed, to redress their unequal position in a given society, adopting peace-keeping strategies that seek to prevent the outbreak of conflict at any cost may well prove counter-productive. Indeed, protracting frustration in the name of peace can in certain cases be conducive to violent backlashes when the basis for sustained development is not laid.

III. LAND DYNAMICS AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

Although the conflict literature points to the importance of resolving contradictions and tensions of all kinds (political, economic or social) so as to build long-term peace, it does not say much about the specific role of land dynamics in the outbreak or persistence of violence. This is surprising, as land is not only an essential source of livelihood in rural areas characterised by a scarcity of productive assets — and thus potentially one of the assets worth fighting over — but more generally a central element in the varied and complex social relations of production and reproduction within which conflict between individuals and groups are bred. Land therefore combines strong economic and emotional values, to the extent that “people’s behaviour in relation to land mirrors the general state of interaction among members of society” (Sanjak, 2000).

Given the specificity of the historical and geographical contexts in which such phenomena unfold, trying to sketch all the potential links between land and conflict in developing countries would take this paper beyond its scope. One useful way of framing a less ambitious discussion of the land/conflict dynamics is to look at societies going through the various stages of a transition to a market-driven agriculture, a process that underpins structural change and “development”. In this context, an agriculture where most farms operate on a commercial basis, regardless of their size, may be said to have undergone an *agrarian transformation* (de Janvry, 1981). While such transformation cannot be regarded as a linear process, and its path is virtually unpredictable, most developing countries today may be described as being *at some intermediary stage* of this transformation, with rural societies increasingly depending on market mediation to ensure the reproduction of their means of subsistence⁹, while the persistence of non-market agricultural relations (e.g. based on “customary” or “feudal” tenure) makes it difficult for a number of weaker stakeholders to access livelihoods.

Since any change in the structures of power governing the management of resources in rural areas, without which greater efficiency and equity cannot be achieved¹⁰, will be opposed by beneficiaries of the system in place, the transformation of agriculture is bound to be marred with conflicts of various intensity. The rest of this section distinguishes between such tensions associated with the process of agrarian transformation itself, and the impact of “exogenous” tensions (i.e. not related to rural power structures) on agrarian conflicts.

9. For instance, it is now widely acknowledged that most small farmers in the developing world only partly rely on farming for their reproduction.

10. Mbatha and Watkinson (2003) note that most movements advocating land reform also insist on enhancing production.

Tensions Associated with Agrarian Structures and their Transformation

Where transformation is insufficient to accelerate agricultural growth and create new opportunities, tensions tend to sharpen. Also, changes in the rules of asset distribution will be resisted by groups who hold power — e.g. landlords or “customary” chiefs, which may create violence. In some cases, political grievances insufficiently addressed by land policies may also be a source of conflict.

Recurrent Violence in Inefficient Agricultural Settings

Resistance to the reallocation of land to the most efficient farmers, which is the backbone of agricultural development, is typically embodied in two types of behaviours: large farm owners refusing to sell or rent out their under-utilised land because their profit is derived mainly from non-agricultural activities, and peasant farmers resisting land sales because farming plays a “last resort” security role in their income generation strategy (which typically involves a portfolio of activities including migrating for work)¹¹.

Both types of behaviour are observed in Bangladesh today. Poor families will resist the sale of their very small farms at any cost, despite their being unable to develop into profitable units (World Bank, 2000). Meanwhile, many large farmers are pursuing a strategy of political accumulation, under-utilising land amidst dramatic levels of rural poverty (Khan, 2000)¹². Such agricultural dynamics make the task of the would-be “capitalist” farmer impossible, since (s)he cannot buy land or other inputs easily.

Such an economically inefficient equilibrium is deeply rooted in agrarian power structures. As Khan (*ibid.*) points out, local and state politics in Bangladesh are dominated by “pyramidal” organisations, made up of socially heterogeneous groups. These groups compete for the available stock of resources to enrich their members, largely by seeking and exploiting political and administrative prerogatives. The very intense competition between groups makes it difficult for a particular one to secure a privileged position for a long time. Such uncertainty incites the participants in the currently dominating organisation to hold their assets “in liquid form”, instead of investing them locally in productive activities. This political pattern precludes agricultural growth, and accounts for the failure of any attempt to reform institutions — such as the securing of property rights — that may cut the possibility for competing political organisations to extort resources from other groups. The lasting rural poverty and exploitation resulting from the success of such inefficient political coalitions tends to result in low-level forms of violence (for example illegal expropriation), which lay a fertile ground for political instrumentalisation.

11. As de Janvry (*op. cit.*) puts it: “It is not that peasants do not aim for a profit (surplus); it is that they will remain in production *even* in the face of their inability to earn a profit”.

12. Although size is of course not the only factor affecting productivity and dynamism, the World Bank (2000) identifies the most efficient farms as being somewhere in the middle of a U-shaped curve of the size distribution. As Khan puts it: “Very small farms have low productivity because they lack access to sufficient markets to exploit their advantage in supervising labour. In contrast, large farms face a supervision constraint, and this over-rides their advantage in accessing credit and other markets, so that their overall productivity is low” (Khan, *op. cit.*).

Violent Backlash against Change

Violence may occur as a by-product of the struggle for transformation, often in the form of retaliation by challenged ruling elites against weaker “progressive” movements unable to form sufficiently powerful coalitions to achieve their goals. The often violent reactions to the invasions of empty plots of land carried out by the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) in Brazil provide a telling illustration. In Latin America more generally, most of rural violence from the 1950s onwards resulted from violent retaliation against those who had been demanding the dismantling of large feudal estates, known to keep much under-utilised land (Kay, 2000). For example, during the 1974 Chilean counter-revolution, many *haciendas* were returned to their former owners.

Grievances Related to Land Distribution

Land-related violence can often be traced back to historical grievances related to land distribution in a context characterised by incomplete transformation. Where groups perceiving themselves as despoiled manage to articulate their demands, either through political organisation (as in South Africa), or under the leadership of a political entrepreneur (such as Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe), violent conflicts tend to crystallise long-standing historical grievances. Where land reforms have been initiated, the expectations they have created may also have adverse consequences, both for peace and development, either when they have not been far-reaching enough, or when they have failed to spur agricultural growth. The World Bank’s 2003 Policy Research Report on Land Policies thus advocates productivity-oriented reforms, based on political dialogue, in order to prevent disappointment.

Intergenerational Conflict over Land

Intergenerational conflict over economic and social opportunities may be a major driving force of agrarian change, as observed in West Africa. For instance, the conflict that sparked violence in Côte d’Ivoire at the end of the 1990s was not so much between migrants and indigenous populations, but rather between and even within families. Indeed, intergenerational tensions over land issues would typically involve youth seeking opportunities (e.g. migrating “back” from urban areas where such opportunities have dried up) complaining about parcels of land having been rented out to migrants. Similarly, Richards’ analysis of the causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone (2003) points to the central role played by the aspiration for change of young men and women living in the countryside. Most of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters were from rural areas where the “tradition” of *domestic slavery* was still vivid, and, contrary to a rather common belief, actually enrolled voluntarily¹³.

13. Young men must, under this West African type of labour management system, provide the father of their wife with up to 80 per cent of their labour, sometimes for a very long time. The perpetuation of this practice while the means of accessing livelihood sources became increasingly dependent on the market put an unbearable stress on young rural men and women, and incited them to join the RUF.

However, the RUF struggle eventually led to the return of highly exploitative agrarian relations, in particular with regard to regulation of access to land and labour. The wearing out of the RUF's war effort and the absence of alternative opportunities eventually forced thousands of demobilised young fighters to offer their labour in rural areas where they found themselves, often remote from their region of origin. As Richards puts it:

“They have sunk into the rural underclass, in an agrarian society undermined by a mercantilist regime interested more in feeding its followers from food aid than reorganising and modernising the countryside. New forms of agrarian servitude are beginning to emerge.” (*op. cit.*)

Sierra Leone is therefore a tragic case of self-perpetuating agrarian conflict. Indeed, although the intensity of the war seems to be lessening, it would be wrong to assume that its deep-rooted causes have disappeared. Creating the conditions for long-term peace in Sierra Leone, and in most of West Africa, might thus require supporting the transformation of agriculture, i.e. a substantial change in rural structures of power, whose “customary” appearance often hides a violent reality.

The Impact of Exogenous Conflict on Agrarian Transformation

Violent conflicts not rooted in agrarian transformation, and sometimes not initially related to land, may deeply affect agrarian structures as they modify the balance of political forces that underpin them. In some cases, this may open opportunities for accelerating the pace of agrarian transformation, as in Taiwan and South Korea in the aftermath of the Second World War. The ending of Japanese colonisation — which had contributed to the destruction of “traditional” agrarian structures — was used as an opportunity to carry out a far-reaching land reform (Bernstein, 1994). Land was redistributed and support provided to farming households who intended to maximise their productivity. The economic and social success of these two land reforms, still held models by agricultural economists, and the degree of violence that allowed them to happen however make them exceptional cases.

Very often, however, violent conflicts result in further delaying the process of transformation, endangering access to livelihoods and putting land at the heart of future violent strife. Colonisation and displacement of populations typically turn “home” land into an *object* of violent conflict between groups with competing claims over its use and occupation of the same land. Such conflicts are sometimes recurrent, as in the case of pastoralists in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Colonisation

A major source of conflicts over access to land opposes indigenous populations and colonial or central states providing “settlers” with agricultural opportunities at the expense of the former — as in the case of Latin America's colonisation by the Portuguese and the Spaniards, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, or the settlement of Javanese on smaller islands of the Indonesian archipelago.

In Latin America, the situation of “natives” varies greatly across countries. However, although a couple of the continent’s leaders are of indigenous origin, these communities typically experience difficulties in accessing political power as a group because of their lower position in society. The conflict over land is a long-lasting one, since Latin American “indigenous” people have been deprived of most of what they had (not only land) since the 16th century. However, access and security of tenure over their now small land has been an ongoing subject of political, sometimes violent struggle. Their political and economic weakness means that they have usually been unable to retain their land when it was seized for the constitution of large agricultural estates (or of mines), and have been the victims of violent retaliation when they tried to resist (Kay, 2000). Chiapas is an interesting exception, where a minority has formed a structured political movement with the support of an organised left-wing group, and managed to resist land seizure for non-agricultural exploitation.

In Indonesia, the policy of Javanese colonisation involved large scale population resettlement from the main crowded island to smaller parts of the archipelago, and involved numerous land seizures for the benefit of the settlers. The associated violence has driven several states, including Indonesian Papua, on the verge of civil war (Faure, 2002).

Displaced Populations: Today’s Grievances, Tomorrow’s Conflicts

People (or borders) are often displaced in the wake of conflicts, and many wars in ancient and recent history can actually be partly traced back to previous forced migrations or separation from the rest of a given community. Unresolved consequences of “exogenous” (i.e. non land-related) conflicts such as the “return” of refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) removing new occupiers, thus often sow the seeds for a new, more violent conflict. For that reason, of all land-related conflicts, those following the uprooting of populations may be considered as the most predictable.

Very importantly, whether violence actually occurs will depend not on the mere existence of grievances, however sharp they may be, but on the degree of political organisation, and the eventual instrumentalisation of frustrated groups along antagonistic identity lines (ethnic, religious, regional, etc.) by political “entrepreneurs” seeking access to power and resources¹⁴. Conversely, if mediation efforts are undertaken to reconcile parties, and displaced populations are provided with sufficient opportunities to access livelihoods, grievances may dry up and instrumentalisation be avoided.

Criminalisation rather than Transformation in the Aftermath of Violent Conflict

Major conflicts wiping out customary systems will not pave the way to a “positive” transformation of agriculture unless adequate leadership, institutions and resources are in place, such as witnessed in post-WW II South Korea and Taiwan. Where those

14. The concept of “political entrepreneur” is borrowed from Bayart (1990), whose analysis is set in an African context. It was also noted during the seminar that gave rise to this paper that, although times of acute economic crisis are particularly favourable to built-up grievances being instrumentalised by such “entrepreneurs”, this may happen in a period of prosperity as well.

conditions are not in place, the remnants of “traditional” agrarian systems may actually form the basis a more modern one, but in a sub-optimal manner from the point of view of sustainable economic growth, for example by remaining embedded in a (“feudal”) system of political accumulation, while linking with global trading networks of a criminal kind. Colombia and Pakistan are examples where chronic violence helps sustain the “criminalisation of land”, but post-Taliban Afghanistan provides another illustration of customary systems going “wrong” in the aftermath of a major conflict. Pain and Lautze (2002) shows that, in that country, the manipulation of “customary” regulation of access to increasingly scarcer assets (in particular land) has become an object of fighting between rival factions with dubious “traditional” legitimacy. In a context of extreme scarcity and uncertainty, peasants turn to growing poppy seeds not because they derive higher profits from them than from other crops, but because village chiefs — who trade the output and capture the benefits — are responsible for the attribution of land plots and other inputs, and favour those peasants willing to engage in this cultivation. Poppy-seed growing thus becomes the safest way of getting an additional plot on which to cultivate essential subsistence staples¹⁵. This in turns breeds high levels of resentment and insecurity, which constitute a threat for peace in the short and long run.

Other Exogenous Factors Affecting the Violent Nature of Agrarian Dynamics

Agrarian dynamics, and the tensions they generate, are also deeply affected by a variety of external factors other than violent conflict itself, such as climate, natural disasters¹⁶, the fluctuations in international commodity prices, changes in international investment flows, etc. Importantly, those factors include the consequences of third country policies (trade, etc.). Although this subject is not well documented yet, several of the conflict (or peace) dynamics referred to in this paper may be related to international economic issues. For instance, where a group of small commercial farmers is lobbying to modernise agrarian structures, its capacity to access consumer markets abroad will be a key feature of its success, not only as a business group, but also as a political one. Conversely, obstacles to accessing international markets may delay agricultural development, or even cause it to fail, threatening livelihood security and spurring conflict. This suggests that looking at the land and conflict issue through the lens of “policy coherence for development”, for instance, by focusing on the link between agrarian conflicts and international commodity markets and rules, may be essential to any endeavour to reduce the incidence of violent conflicts worldwide.

15. The author argues that current post-conflict aid programmes in Afghanistan fail to address those dynamics and the changing rural balance of forces. See also Section V in this paper.

16. Mass displacement as a result of natural disaster can exacerbate tensions in areas where there is already a risk of conflict, as was the case following the volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo near Goma, DR Congo, in January 2002. The possibilities of temporary settlement for displaced persons were limited, as the surrounding bush was hardly an option due to the presence of active guerrillas (based on a comment by Graham Saunders - Sphere Project).

IV. LAND POLICY, CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT

Establishing a general pattern of land/conflict dynamics is an arduous task, as land dynamics are complex and rapidly changing, and related conflicts may or may not escalate into violence. The above distinction between “endogenous” and “exogenous” agrarian tensions is thus somewhat artificial, but it helps demonstrate that *i)* whether they result from pre-existing agrarian tensions or not, conflict situations deeply affect the politics of land, and *ii)* whether it is at the heart of a conflict or gets dragged into it, land is a very sensitive element of the evolution of societies that requires a careful approach.

As a result, policies pertaining to land (Box 3) can hardly be “neutral” in terms of conflict management. The rest of this section thus starts by reflecting on the inherent difficulty in trying to promote peace together with fundamental changes in agrarian systems. It then turns to two essential instruments of the development of agrarian structures, land redistribution and tenure security, and looks at ways of using them to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict by helping to resolve tensions over agrarian structures. Conversely, it also points to cases where the same land policies may actually spark or worsen conflict.

Box 3. Land Policy in a Nutshell

Very schematically, land policy focusing on the conditions for the productive use of land may be considered to include:

- i) registration and titling;
- ii) land taxation;
- iii) the regulatory framework that impedes or facilitates land sales and land rentals, and
- iv) policies that aim to alter the distribution of land ownership.

Stability vs. Transformation: Can Land Policy Help Promote Peace and Development?

If agrarian transformation involves conflict, what does this imply for policy makers seeking to promote both peace and development? In some cases, conflict may actually be seen as “a normal part of broader and useful changes”. From this point of view, “making transformation work” may be the best option for securing peace in the long run; conversely, impeding it could be most damaging. Indeed, slow agricultural growth, with no significant layer of commercial farms emerging, is a dull perspective for peace in the long run, as it foresees fewer opportunities for rural populations — in terms of jobs and income — than demographic growth may require, continued vulnerability to price shocks affecting agricultural commodities (a common source of violent outbursts), environmental degradation, etc.

Achieving agrarian transformation — as peacefully as possible — may thus be seen as a common goal of agricultural development and conflict prevention strategies.

This raises several difficult questions, among which: what should “as peacefully as possible” mean? How could policy makers possibly plan and monitor the degree of conflict that may stem from measures fostering agrarian transformation? What level of violence may be deemed tolerable by policy makers as part of this process?

Modern Rwanda provides an example of the ambiguity of policies aimed at promoting the early stages of the transformation of an agrarian system, and the haziness of policy options facing decision makers. The current National Habitat Policy was presented as an endeavour by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in power to *i*) deflect the potential for conflict linked to the return of refugees in a context of land scarcity, and to *ii*) modernise the agricultural sector dominated by isolated scattered farms, by creating villages gathering farmers (and potential labourers) while clearing land for cultivation (thus “freeing” young people in rural areas from the “traditional” constraints of farm labour). Although one-way statements about this ongoing policy would be inappropriate at this time, it may be argued that its potential effects on the long-term resolution of land-related conflicts, to the extent that it implied resorting to violent enforcement, are unclear at best (see Box 4).

Box 4. The National Habitat Policy in Rwanda

In 1994, Rwanda embarked on a programme of resettlement of Tutsi refugees returning from a long exile. In 1996, a new resettlement programme was started under the “National Habitat Policy” (NHP). While it is generally agreed that the former was successful, the NHP is deemed to be far less exemplary, as it involved forced resettlement of rural inhabitants, both Tutsi and Hutu.

The central theme of the NHP, which was implemented without popular participation, was to concentrate the building of new dwellings (funded by international donors) in government-created villages called *imidugudu* (plural *umudugudu*). While most of the homeless Tutsi (or Hutu) did not complain about moving into these new villages, many Rwandans living in their homes in rural areas were also forced to move into the *umudugudu*, and to destroy their former houses. Interviews with Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicate that opposition by home owners was met by extremely fierce retaliation in several regions. Apparently, no one was killed for refusing to move, but violence, imprisonment and heavy fines were widely used.

According to the government, one of the rationales for the NHP was that conflict over land ownership was threatening peace, especially in the Eastern region where most refugees had returned. Although this may have been the case, the method adopted remains controversial. In this context, the fact that it was partly donor-funded, and the very mild criticism voiced by the donor community, are stressed by the HRW report.

The programme was scaled back in 2000, but is still running, and the violence it entails does not appear to have ceased. Although it is difficult to reach firm predictions regarding its potential effects on new conflicts over land, two preliminary conclusions may be drawn: *i*) the “conflict prevention” dimension of this programme may be questioned when its very nature involves state violence targeted at the poor; *ii*) donors could have reacted to the forced nature of the NHP, and attempted to foster a less violent, possibly participatory approach.

Source: Human Rights Watch, 2001b.

In other situations, where agriculture is already dominated by commercial farming, conflict may still arise, often around mobilisation for the “correction of historical inequalities”, as in Southern Africa. In such cases, a certain amount of land reform, combined with other policies, may be necessary, but it will be successful only if the productivity of agriculture as a whole is not jeopardised, as we see below.

Land Redistribution: for Better or Worse

In contexts characterised by sharp inequalities in the distribution of land, and of assets in general, land reform may seem an attractive solution to land-related tensions, as well as an instrument to promote a more productive agriculture as the basis for sustained growth and peace. As emphasised by the World Bank (2003):

“Where extreme inequality in land distribution and underutilisation of vast tracts of productive land co-exist with deep rural poverty, a case for redistributive measures to increase access to land by the poor can be made, both politically and from an economic perspective”.

Nevertheless, a successful land reform may be achieved only under certain conditions, some of which are listed below. Land reform may also go “wrong” and cause violent conflict as shown in Box 5.

Equity and Efficiency: Achieving the Right Mix

Ensuring broad-based participation from design until completion is essential to ensure the reform addresses historical grievances and reinforces peace. However, efficiency remains essential. Indeed, since the ultimate aim of land reform is to generate economic opportunities through enhanced agricultural growth, failing to realise the “productivity dividend” of land reform will itself be a threat to peace, as seen in Zimbabwe. Strong leadership in the process of land reform is thus required in order to achieve the difficult mix of equity and efficiency — both of which are necessary to contain tensions.

Enforcement is a Political Process

Land reform programmes inspired by market principles have experienced difficulties in demonstrating themselves as an effective tool because they have tended to overlook political factors, and because non-economic factors often drive the price of land above its capitalised economic value. Borras (2003) thus looks at the reasons behind the disappointing results of Market-Assisted Land Reform (MALR) in Colombia, Brazil and South Africa. He challenges the assumption that administrative and technical weaknesses — such as poor credit markets or insufficient administrative capacity — are responsible for the failure, and argues that the main reasons are deeply political. Since state-led land reforms involving seizures have often been met with fierce resistance, MALR programmes have relied on the assumption that landlords would welcome the possibility of selling land at a reasonable (market) price. In reality, “most landlords attempted, successfully, to overprice their land sale transactions” (Borras, *op. cit.*).

Indeed, the political balance of power, translated into market power, lies at the core of price determination in land-sales markets as in other markets. Such market power usually is in the hands of landlords, as access to information and financial assistance schemes are insufficient to compensate for the lack of organisational and political power of poor landless workers and peasants¹⁷. This point is particularly

17. “Effective articulation by the poor rural subordinate classes requires political power, because in most cases the process of organising, processing and articulating demands is constrained by the very social and political environment that necessitates the land-based demands of the poor” (Borras, *op. cit.*).

important for understanding the mixed results of land reform programmes in those three countries, because MALR mainly relies on *negotiation*, and political power clearly increases the capacity of large land owners to sustain a lengthy process. While the importance of distorting power relations is increasingly acknowledged by the promoters of MALR, it is worth pointing out that similar flaws prevented the successful completion of many state-led land reforms, especially in Latin America (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 1989).

Looking at Asian experiences of land reform, Putzel (2000) makes a similar point and emphasises the importance of creating political alliances which are involved in the design and implementation of the reform. More generally, Moore and Putzel (2001) stress the need for “thinking strategically about politics and poverty” as a prerequisite to technical projects aimed at making land reform conducive to peace and development. As the World Bank puts it:

“The political nature of land reform programs implies that even in situations where such programs can lead to significant improvements in productivity and household welfare, as in the case of Brazil (...), countries are unlikely to undertake them unless a strong political movement campaigns for their implementation” (*op. cit.*)

Decentralisation is not a Panacea

Although assumed to be more transparent and closer to “ground-level realities” than national politics, local politics often exhibit no such features when looked at in detail — especially in contexts marked by the embedded domination of large landowners. In Africa, British colonial rule — often referred to as “indirect rule” — greatly weighted the balance of forces at the level of villages in favour of chiefs. This situation has not been significantly altered after decolonisation, and incited Mamdani (1996) to describe it as “decentralised despotism”. Thus, even when agrarian structures appear to be organised along “customary” rules, they do not necessarily foster “harmony” between community members. Chauveau (1998) thus argues that:

“As an element of broader social relations, and a result from history and power relations, customary tenure rules and practice do not constitute an endogenous, closed and harmonious system [...]. The process by which rights are acquired and protected is hence deeply political”.¹⁸

He argues that West African small holder agriculture is subject to a variety of external and internal pressures, to which different customary systems react differently. Yet, a common feature seems to be that local dynamics tend to reinforce the most powerful members of the community (usually middle aged land owning men). When economic opportunities are rising, a process of differentiation is observed, which favours those who are able to invest in land productivity (Woodhouse 2003); when opportunities are becoming scarcer, the pressure on livelihoods puts at odds customary and other claims to land, and results either in the exclusion of the weaker or in violent conflict. As Woodhouse (*ibid.*) puts it:

“When competition for land intensifies, the inclusive flexibility offered by customary rights can quickly become an uncharted terrain on which the least powerful are vulnerable to exclusion as a result of the manipulation of ambiguity by the more powerful”.

18. Translated by the authors.

Therefore, assuming “decentralised” ownership of projects to be more legitimate or efficient “by essence” may be misleading. For all their shortcomings, central states have an essential role to play in promoting peace and development in rural areas, including through a process of decentralisation. First, they can balance the influence of local authorities *viz.* the weaker groups (often the young, women, and strangers). Second, they can ensure induced patterns of change are consistent with overall goals of economic growth and environmental sustainability.

What if Land Reform is Not an Option?

If the fundamental aim of land reform is to provide people with *opportunities* so as to reduce the probability of outbreak of violent conflict, without jeopardising overall agricultural production, then land does not have to be the only answer to land-related claims. Actually, in rural areas where population density is very high compared to the yields that may be expected, e.g. in most of South and much of South East Asia, but also in Rwanda and Burundi, large-scale land redistribution would be irrelevant, both in economic and in political terms. It may weaken the productivity of agriculture, and hence fail to deliver expected results. Even where some land reallocation may be necessary to secure peace, it may not be sufficient to respond to claims.

In such cases, alternative or complementary policies may be necessary to deal with claims in a way that fosters peace and economic development. Looking at Bangladesh, Ahmed *et al.* (1998, 2000) insists on the importance of maintaining the prices of essential foodstuff at affordable levels in order to protect the livelihoods of peasants and workers, and to prevent violent riots. He also advocates state-supported job creation in infrastructure development, in order to provide off-farm economic opportunities to poor rural dwellers and to raise agricultural productivity. Similarly, in the East African context, Cramer and Sender (1999) show that insufficient road infrastructure severely constrains the development of agriculture, by raising the cost of inputs and making outputs more expensive to export. Rural infrastructure development could therefore be considered as a part of conflict reduction strategies, by supporting agriculture as well as providing opportunities to those unable to engage in farming. This argument is of course even stronger, with respect to land reform, in post-conflict settings: while redistribution is needed to meet the claims of war veterans, using land as the sole element of it could endanger the economic viability of reform (Cramer and Weeks, 2000).

Box 5. Land Reforms in Zimbabwe and in South Africa

Although land reform may be regarded as a legitimate claim with respect to the violent history of Rhodesian plantations, the recent Zimbabwean experience may be considered a counter-example of “best practice” in land reform. So far, in 2003, the main outcome of the “Fast-track resettlement” process started in 1997 has been the near destruction of the Zimbabwean agriculture, and economy. Out of the large and very productive farms which were seized, the government neither managed to create a dynamic small farm agriculture, nor to appease the grievances of urban and “communal area” dwellers¹⁹. On the contrary, commercial-farm workers and their families, a total of about two million, i.e. one fifth of the population, have been altogether excluded from land redistribution programmes, and many simply lost their jobs (Pons-Vignon, 2001). With large tobacco plantations being moved to Tanzania, and skilled commercial farmers starting new businesses in Mozambique, it is unlikely that Zimbabwe will be able to recover rapidly from the crisis it has suffered over the last years (Sachikonye, 2003). In fact, the consequences of the demise of Zimbabwean commercial farms reach even further, since the country can not be the granary of Southern Africa any longer, spurring or worsening food crises among several of its neighbours, most notably Malawi.

In neighbouring South Africa, the pacification of land relations requires a successful land reform for reasons of both economic efficiency and equity. While the country is far from having succeeded yet in creating the layer of small black commercial farms it hopes to see drive the development of its agriculture, it has managed the process with far more political and economic *savoir-faire* than Zimbabwe (Van den Brink, 2003). A partial land reform was carried out, providing land to those willing to engage in commercial agriculture, coupled with a number of “restitutions” on the basis of well-documented claims. Although restitutions often involve highly productive large farms, they do not necessarily result in their dismantling: new owners, aware of their inability to maintain activities on the same scale, simply re-lease the land to their operators. Such a process makes it possible to *i)* protect productive farms, and the important agri-business which relies on them, and *ii)* achieve redistribution, not necessarily in the form of land, but to an extent which appeases claims for the reparation of the expropriations carried out under the Apartheid regime (Mbatha and Watkinson, 2003).

Yet, challenges remain manifold for land reform in South Africa. Mbatha and Watkinson (2003) argue that purchasing and allocation processes should be more transparent and efficient, in order to accelerate redistribution. The frustrations created by slow delivery seem to account for the growing violence observed on large commercial farms in South Africa: since the end of the apartheid regime, more than 1 500 white farmers have been murdered, while human rights reports suggest that even far more (black) farm workers have been killed, beaten and raped (Human Rights Watch, 2001a). Concomitantly, Mbatha and Watkinson (*ibid.*) insist on the importance of sticking to the principle of avoiding the dismantling of productive enterprises, in order to maintain production and employment levels. Indeed, a collapse in agricultural production and opportunities for wage labourers could result, as in Zimbabwe, in violent upheavals. Along with improving delivery, the authors stress the importance for South Africa to make land reform *work*, by implementing an active and tailor-suited land policy for new farmers, who still face a number of heavy constraints (not least their difficult relationships with white-dominated marketing boards). In that respect, Anseeuw (forthcoming) shows that the level of *organisation* of new farmers is crucial to their success, as demonstrated by the better results obtained by former miners who continue to receive support from the well-structured National Union of Miners.

Securing Land Tenure to Secure Peace?

Property Rights, Agricultural Growth and Peace

Secured property rights facilitate investment and efficient resource utilisation. They are the cornerstone of a well-functioning market economy (Binswanger *et al.*, 1995). This applies to the development of agriculture, as exemplified in the case of Taiwan and South Korea (Bernstein, *op. cit.*). If their tenure rights are protected, new small holders will more readily invest in productive assets and engage in land markets. Similarly, large companies will feel more confident that their return on investment is protected²⁰.

19. “Communal areas” were created by the colonisers of Southern Rhodesia to expropriate rural dwellers from land intended for mining and, later, commercial farming.

20. Considering ways of attracting external investors in agriculture, Putzel (2000) points out that “For large agribusiness corporations, there is increasingly a lack of concern for land ownership. What is important to the modern corporation is that property rights be clearly assigned.”

Moreover, a system that secures tenure for land users — whether they own land, rent it or drive cattle over it — not only fosters economic efficiency and environmental sustainability, it also has positive implications for peace in the long run. Among other things, it is essential for the success of land reform, and for keeping land relations peaceful. It can also reduce the scope for acute situations of hardship to lead to conflict²¹. As one participant in the OECD/USAID seminar put it:

“Conflicts and rebel movements thrive in territories where the state has no control. If a property rights system, fairly ‘controlled’ by the state, is in place, the ensuing relationship between the citizen and the state tends to make it harder for rebels to recruit fighters or obtain land.”

Recognising the importance of secure property rights for the promotion of peace and growth, while often viewing their absence mostly as an institutional shortcoming, donors have embarked on large-scale titling programmes. In particular, since the late 1980s national and donor-funded policies focusing on land administration have been aiming to implement a unified, state-controlled system of land tenure, over and above existing “customary” arrangements (Chauveau and Lavigne-Delville, 2002). The rationale behind these programmes is that:

“... negotiability and ambiguity of customary rights constitute insecurity of tenure that acts as an obstacle to productivity-enhancing investment [therefore] registration of formal titling is necessary to create security of tenure to improve the likelihoods of investment” (Woodhouse, 2003).

Another expected benefit of formal titling programmes is to allow owners to collateralise their land more easily, thereby facilitating access to credit. This has been particularly emphasised for peri-urban shanty-town dwellers, who sometimes have a record of more than 30 years of plot occupation, but cannot claim ownership (de Soto, 1989)²². Titling programmes may thus be framed into pro-poor strategies to reduce the scope for civil unrest along with urban poverty.

Discussions in the seminar came to two conclusions on land tenure policy. Firstly, considering land tenure reform as a merely technical exercise may be misleading, as it pertains to an essential attribute of power within societies (over the allocation of an essential resource), and political aspects unavoidably prevail. Secondly, in determining the most appropriate forms of registration (customary vs. “modern”), a pragmatic approach, not necessarily relying on “official” registration, may be more efficient than either trusting “traditional” systems, or trying to supersede them by new ones. These conclusions reflect the consensus (at least pertaining to Africa) expressed in the World Bank’s Report on Land Policy (2003), which stresses that:

“Increasing security of tenure does not necessarily require issuing formal individual titles, and in many circumstances more simple measures to enhance tenure security can make a big difference at a much lower cost than formal titles. (...) The most appropriate and cost-effective mechanisms to increase tenure security, and whether or not transferability will be needed, will have to be determined [according] to the circumstances prevailing in any given situation.” (World Bank, *op. cit.*)

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21. The example of Sierra Leone shows how “customary arrangements under stress” can provide a fertile terrain for violent political mobilisation.
 22. In Brazil for instance, the importance of formal titling programmes in cities like São Paulo is receiving increased public attention through the action of the Movement of homeless workers (*MTST*, see *Le Monde*, 24 September 2003).

The Political Economy of Land Tenure Reform

The numerous failures encountered by formal titling programmes, especially those focused merely on technical aspects, call for a re-examination of the *methods* used to implement tenure systems. In particular, recent analytical work stresses the importance of case-sensitive design and implementation to maximise the chances of the new system being accepted. For instance, a common source of reluctance to participate in titling programmes is the fear that they may eventually constitute a basis for taxation. Lessons learnt thus include: *i)* adopting pragmatic approaches to titling, *ii)* involving local population in the process, and *iii)* paying special attention to cases where competing claims may escalate into violent outbursts (Williamson, 2000).

More generally, whereas in situations where agriculture is dominated by commercial farming, land policy may be well-received and conducive to growth and long-term peace, in other settings political resistance by challenged vested interests opposing the promotion of a fully market-based agriculture may be very strong. Such a context makes it extremely difficult to implement institutional reforms inspired by land policy “best practice” (e.g. in World Bank, 2003) as part of a merely technical exercise. If powerful groups willing to prevent the actual redistribution of land fail to obstruct agrarian reform, they will attempt to overturn its outcome in practice — and they will succeed if enforcement mechanisms to protect tenure security are not broadly supported. Conversely reform imposed by a powerful state may not leave room for open conflict, but it is bound to create resentment, which may later fuel violence²³.

Therefore, technical approaches to tenure security and enforcement institutions may be effective and sustainable only if they are part of a broader, accepted and enforced political process, possibly involving some land restitution and/or compensation. For instance, a consensus emerged during the seminar’s discussions on the importance of tenure security for indigenous people in Latin America in order to prevent violent outbursts of revolt or repression. However, achieving this security and sustaining it will depend on indigenous populations’ ability to defend their interests effectively on local and national political scenes. A process of political empowerment and participation may thus be a prerequisite to the effective enforcement of tenure security.

“Customary” vs. “Modern” Tenure Systems

Recent studies question the desirability and feasibility of a top-down approach, whereby a formal market replaces “customary” authorities as the allocating agency. One argument revolves around the role of “customary” rights, as opposed to “modern” land

23. For instance, in Rwanda, government plans regarding the registration of plots only apply to plots larger than one hectare. Since over 90 per cent of plots in the country are actually *smaller* than 1 hectare, this would imply that rights over them would not be secured. This reflects the Rwandan Patriotic Front’s (RPF, the Tutsi-dominated governing party) historical view that scattered housing and farming in Rwanda is the source of its weak agricultural development. While this may be true to some extent, the new tenure system could have, according to Human Rights Watch (2001*b*), dramatically adverse consequences in this still very tense context. Most rural dwellers would continue to face tenure insecurity, while a privileged minority may try to extend the scope of its registered plots, which may provoke food insecurity, and lead to local conflicts.

tenure, in preventing pauperisation and civil unrest. Some indeed argue that land title registration fails to protect the poor, and hence to prevent conflict in many developing countries because it *i)* favours the richer members of local communities, *ii)* ignores secondary rights to land (e.g. grazing) which can be an important protection against extreme poverty, *iii)* tends to hamper access to land by women, and *iv)* may result in distress sales in crisis situations, further weakening the poorer groups (IIED, 1999; Toulmin and Quan, 2000). They claim that, on the contrary:

“the flexibility (or ‘negotiability’) of access to land through kinship under customary law offers the possibility of re-allocation of land to poorer community members on the basis of need” (Woodhouse, *op. cit.*).

The situation of Sahelian countries such as Mali illustrates that point: as climate variations lead to significant periodic changes in the location of productive land, flexible land tenure and management systems are necessary to prevent the building up of tensions.

Although the transition to Western-type land markets can be a source of tension, it seems that, as far as the African continent is concerned at least, the characteristics of “customary” agrarian structures are not well captured by the aforementioned competing approaches. Firstly, much of the research on the dynamics of change in rural areas shows that, regardless of the nature of tenure systems (customary or “modern”), land associated with promising economic opportunities tends to be privately appropriated. Individuals in a position of power within existing tenure systems use it as an instrument of accumulation. This runs counter to the idea that customary arrangements either constitute a safety net for the poor, or represent the major obstacle to investment and transformation (privatisation being a consequence of investment rather than a prerequisite).

Secondly, the evolution of land tenure under customary arrangements does not appear to provide particular protection for the weaker members of communities, who find themselves excluded because they are unable to invest in enhancing land productivity (Bernstein *et al.*, 2000; Lund, 2000).

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR DONOR POLICIES

If, as the earlier sections seem to indicate, land is at the heart of many conflicts, and if land policy, by affecting power relations and the relative positions of different social groups, potentially bears a major impact on the likelihood of outbreak of violent conflict, then what does this imply for donors seeking to promote peace and development? This section aims to help formulate preliminary proposals on how they can best incorporate land issues in their policy frameworks for the management and mitigation of conflict, and how they can bring the conflict dimension within their land-related development co-operation policies. It does actually go one step further by including donor policies that are neither directly related to land or conflict management, but may affect the land/conflict dynamics in developing countries.

This list of preliminary recommendations draws primarily from the experience of experts participating in the “Land, Conflict and Development” informal seminar, and the discussions that took place among them. Three notes of caution should be kept in mind. Firstly, it must be stressed that at this stage, a comprehensive review of donor practices remains to be conducted, which would seek to assess how they handle land issues within their conflict prevention policies, and how they take account of conflict dynamics within their land-related policies. Having been formulated in the absence of such material, the following list therefore merely provides pointers that call for more evidence and deeper analysis. Secondly, the list does not aim to be exhaustive, as the inventory of co-operation policies that potentially affect the outcome of land and/or conflict policies, from infrastructure to micro-credit, is very wide. It is hoped, however, that it provides a set of “core” issues to work from. Finally, these preliminary recommendations are the result of an informal brainstorming which did not attempt to forge consensus on all issues. It should therefore be seen as an input into the definition of best practices and policy recommendations by the international donor community.

1. In Areas Emerging from Conflict, Take Rapid and Sustained Action on Land

As noted by practitioners during the seminar, land issues are generally not factored into vulnerability risk assessments and conflict assessment tools. Therefore, they are rarely proposed as part of the solutions to possible outbreaks of violence or war. There was a sense that getting land tenure experts to work with conflict teams early on might help improve the effectiveness of post-conflict response.

Give Early Attention to Land Issues

A widely-held assumption is that land policy can sustain peace only after it has been secured by “other means”. Instead, the discussion suggested that, in places emerging from conflict, economic and social problems deriving from land deprivation require early, appropriate action if peace is to be secured in the long term. However, they appear to be underestimated by the donor community, which seems to have a tendency to adopt piecemeal, *ad hoc* strategies.

In the case of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime, Pain and Lautze (2002) stresses land deprivation as a major source of frustration that accounts at least in part for the development of opium cultivation. In this context, Wiley (2003) criticises the donor community’s attitude who sees local land disputes as being “too complex, bewildering or sensitive to address at this time”. She argues that relying on “local management” of these problems, as donors do, is very hazardous, given that “traditional social reciprocity [...] shows signs of being in demise. The majority poor may decreasingly rely on the rich to keep them housed, fed or landed”.

Dealing from the outset with land issues is thus key to ensuring that peace will be widely accepted in areas emerging from fighting, and will be conducive to reconstruction rather than to the deepening of grievances. The seminar helped formulate some preliminary recommendations for mainstreaming approaches that reduce both the short-term and the long-term potential for conflict over land, namely: take quick action on security of tenure, and make sure aid and mediation efforts are sustained.

Address Land-related Claims

Security of tenure and adjudication of disputes should be dealt with at the micro level from the outset. According to Fitzpatrick (2002) “[...] unless the immediate issues of property destruction and refugees are handled well, resolution of more long-term issues relating to property restitution and land administration in general will be greatly complicated”. He thus argues that land policy in immediate post-conflict settings should focus on:

- i) “managing ad hoc housing occupations through a system of temporary allocation permits and developing co-operation with UNHCR on housing conflicts caused by the process of refugee return, particularly by diverting returnees to temporary transit centres, and
- ii) “managing developing informal markets through a rudimentary ‘deeds registration system’ to inject partial certainty into land administration until a final system for determining and recording property ownership can be established”.

Responding to the immediate “basic needs” of refugees and IDPs should not be the sole focus of interventions. The best way to render them less vulnerable to violent mobilisation is to provide them with an *alternative* when return is impossible, which implies that long term plans have to be considered early on. Gauer (2003) documents the experience of Sierra-Leonean refugees in Guinea, who asked to remain near Conakry, where they could find employment, but were moved by the UNHCR at the request of the Government of Guinea to a remote area. As a result, a large majority preferred to return to Sierra-Leone, where violence was ongoing.

In the longer term, since forced expulsions from land and property are a very common source of violent conflict, the right of return and the restitution of property and housing (or compensation), should be given at least as much attention as the process of return itself in fostering reconciliation and recovery. In this regard, promising cases of *Property Commissions* (or *Claims Commissions*), including Cyprus and to some extent Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggest that, provided it is massive and sustained, donor intervention can play a critical positive role. According to Theotocatos and Zetter (2003), if designed correctly from the outset, such Commissions can:

- i) play a leading part in processes of reconciliation and property restitution, by facilitating dialogue while dealing with competing claims, resettlement and compensation in the aftermath of conflicts involving mass population displacements;
- ii) provide early warning indicators, as they begin to collect claims and gather a critical mass of data during the registration process;
- iii) extend a strong message of reconciliation in their daily interactions with the claimants.

Conversely, if the Commission fails to deliver on some of its core objectives, for example if it delays getting back to claimants or if claimants cannot get through to it, the experience might prove counter productive as claimants lose faith in the process.

Sustain Your Effort

The deleterious effects of interrupting land mediation processes initiated by donors, especially in tense situations, cannot be overemphasised. It is essential that projects be funded until they are completed, otherwise populations sceptical of the co-operative process may contribute to sharpening antagonisms by providing justification to those who, in each group, foster violent action. It was also noted during the seminar that ensuring sustained funding may lead donors to reconsidering their evaluation methodologies of mediation programmes.

Sustained assistance is also necessary in the case of macro-level land policies. Collier and Hoeffler (2002) find that aid is “considerably more effective in augmenting growth in post-conflict situations than in other situations”. Moreover, they find that social policies should take priority over sectoral policies, thereby strengthening the focus on equity over efficiency.

2. Invest in Analytical and Monitoring Tools

One key conclusion of the seminar was the need to equip donors with better analytical and monitoring tools, so that their policies can be formulated and implemented based on adequate information, with a view to “doing no harm”. One particular area where such tools were needed was *politics*, i.e. both local politics and the politics of donors’ own intervention. Another was the development of more land-sensitive early warning indicators.

The Local Politics of Land

If donors are to help prevent the outbreak of violence, they need to work from a thorough understanding of the complex social and political dynamics which exacerbate tensions between groups — including the politics of land. Indeed, strategies to enhance land use efficiency that focus only on technical aspects of land policy (such as plot registration) are likely to fail if they do not pay enough attention to associated local dynamics. For example, donors should be able to spot early on whether adverse political conditions may preclude the actual functioning of institutions they plan to help set up (e.g. to secure tenure rights), and thus prevent effective rights from being enforced. This calls for a land policy approach by donors that moves beyond technical programmes centred on institutions, and confronts the politics of land in recipient countries.

Obviously, this also applies to conflict prevention and monitoring strategies, where failing to grasp the complex chain of grievances in conflict-torn situations may lead to brokering hasty peace agreements, which almost invariably breed long-term conflict. Examples of successful short-term conflict settlements which did little to prevent the resurgence of violence later on are numerous. Regrettably, “failed peace” can often be linked to the very content of dispute settlements, which laid the ground for new, often deeper, conflict. Palestinians and Israelis are a case in point, with land playing a central role. Many settlements reached between the parties in conflict, which often involved third countries, sowed the very seeds of the next violent conflict, be it conventional or low-intensity.

Experts in the seminar suggested that, at a minimum, in any given context, donors should *i)* be aware of the role of land and its importance for local stakeholders, *ii)* grasp the internal diversity of groups in conflict, as well as those standing by, and *iii)* avoid a static approach, as conflict never follows a linear sequence of “*pre*, during and *post*”.

Therefore, a political analysis of land needs to be more deliberately integrated upstream into development co-operation and peace-building programmes, as it deals with an essential source of livelihood and identity — and is, hence, highly conflict-prone. One recommendation that emerged from the seminar in relation to that issue was to design a “Conflict Information Toolkit” for land practitioners, so that donor agencies are better equipped to monitor the potential for both conflict and peace related to land. This could include a generic part on the land/conflict relations in general, and a context-specific part explaining the complexity of the local situation.

The Politics of Intervention

Land-related programmes — as well as development programmes not aimed at conflict prevention more generally — may unintentionally foster conflict, because they ignore the social and political balance of forces in the country where they are implemented. As put by one expert during the seminar:

“We intervene at a certain point of history without being properly informed of the complexity of the issues. We need more in-depth needs assessments and political analyses.”

Another participant noted that while the focus was often put on *how donors help* in pre- or post-conflict situations, analysis actually reveals that in many cases donors have made conflicts worse or more violent, citing cases of technically-biased programmes fostering cadastral systems without monitoring their social impacts, or the lending of support to indigenous groups without actually knowing whether their concerns were legitimate, etc. Other examples include structural adjustment programmes contributing to increasing tensions between groups, sometimes leading to conflict when the initial situation was fragile (see Storey, 1999, on Rwanda, Cramer and Weeks, 1999, on Sierra Leone and Liberia).

The National Habitat Policy in Rwanda also provides an example of a donor-sponsored programme in danger of exacerbating existing tensions, due to inadequate attention having been paid to both the local politics of land and the coherence of land policy within the broader framework of development assistance and conflict prevention (See Box 4 in Section III).

Besides, the risk of doing harm rather than good obviously applies to conflict-related interventions, where dependency on external donors for the provision of security, food, basic resources, etc., tends to be at its highest. Acknowledging that they are not neutral actors, donors should attempt to monitor early on the impact of their interventions (through development assistance or other policies and relationships) on local politics.

Those factors may call for the designing of “Political Impact Assessment” methods — comparable to environmental impact assessment, and perhaps drawing from the experience of private companies — aimed at contributing to the design of donor programmes. Another recommendation was made about taking a trans-national and regional perspective when looking at land and conflict issues²⁴. It was suggested that a follow-up to the Paris 2003 seminar be organised in a developing region — possibly West Africa — with actors on the ground who could help to develop practical methods or approaches.

Early-warning Mechanisms

Predicting conflicts over land is difficult. However, in the absence of violence, land-related tensions may be assessed in order to identify trends and indications of the vulnerability of a region, country or sub-region to conflict. In that respect, the existence of a grievance, however justified or sharp it may be, can never account for the outbreak of a conflict in itself. Indeed, lack of organised contestation and the repressive power of the state or other actors may prevent frustration from turning into violent action over a long period of time. It is when political mobilisation occurs — e.g. when land-related tensions are instrumentalised — that violence is most likely to burst out. The scope for action hence mostly consists in spotting latent land-related conflict situations, so as to take steps to pull the carpet out from under the feet of potential political entrepreneurs.

Such situations are almost invariably the result of a combination of factors. The following signs of tension over land have been identified as likely to lead to violent conflict, especially if surrounding economic conditions worsen suddenly, and if they are combined:

24. For a regional approach to recent conflicts in West Africa, integrating land within a broader set of factors, see Hussein and Gnisci (2003).

- i) presence of significant and structured indigenous / refugee / minority groups, suffering sharp inequality, particularly with respect to access to land, employment and basic commodities;
- ii) rural economy characterised by “political accumulation”, relying on extortion and/or violence, particularly if available assets are scarce;
- iii) efficient agriculture coupled with politicised tensions around the uneven distribution of land (and other) assets.

Two words of caution may be necessary when analysing such factors. Firstly, they need to be looked at from a dynamic perspective. Secondly, as repeated throughout the seminar, it should be kept in mind that some conflict may be unavoidable in the process of transformation away from a situation of poverty and inequality. Hence, while violence should be avoided, development processes should not be blocked by a “conservative” focus on conflict prevention.

Integrating land elements into operational early-warning indicators, possibly drawing from the above, was considered a priority for future research in order to help donors to predict emerging hotspots and trouble points better.

3. Foster Effective Participation

In order to prevent latent tensions from leading to violent clashes in the short run, donors can play a crucial role by supporting dialogue and negotiation, fostering the effective participation of local stakeholders in the design and implementation of land- and conflict-related projects, as well as in helping weaker groups to articulate their demands. Such processes are also necessary in the longer run, in order to help generate broad-based — though not necessarily consensual — support for changes conducive to development and opportunity creation.

Promote Broad-based Dialogue

Effective participation helps mitigate tensions linked to land policy. A key factor of success is inclusiveness: not only should the state and customary authorities be part of the dialogue, but also — very importantly — *all* groups of land users. Very often, the latter are migrants who depend on others for access to land and other assets. The main challenge is usually to ensure that they have the capacity to articulate their claims effectively. The effective representation of women is often impossible under customary arrangements, and this contributes to their difficulties in accessing land and labour. In that respect, during the “Land, Conflict and Development” seminar, experts from the field warned that participation is too often “mere window dressing”, stressing that:

“among the people who are supposed to be part of decision making and policy formulation are poor people who have none of the skills to even participate, not even the language skills”.

Investing in training and capacity building programmes for stakeholders to become mediators, or providers of paralegal services etc. may thus help genuinely to “transfer the responsibility for maintaining peace and resolving disputes onto the local people”.

Similarly, in post-conflict situations, listening to local stakeholders and making them part of decision-making processes that will affect them and their activities is essential for dealing adequately with the consequences of land-related conflict. For

instance, refugees or people originally displaced from rural areas will not necessarily wish to be settled back in rural areas; actually they often want to settle in urban areas. The seminar brought to the fore the case of IDPs in Angola, where many people had no interest in returning to their original lands. Instead they would seek education opportunities, moving to other lands, starting a private non-farm business, and so on. The impact of conflict on women also requires specific attention because they are particularly exposed during conflicts, and often experience important difficulties when reintegrating a peace economy.

As evidenced by the case of conflicts involving herders, peace initiatives often stem from stakeholders *themselves*. Box 6 below provides an interesting example of a successful attempt by donors to facilitate dialogue in rural Mali. It also shows the importance of case-specific approaches to land policy, as local conditions vary greatly.

Box 6. Dealing with Land-related Conflict through Dialogue in Mali

In Mali, most land is unregistered, and belongs *de facto* to the state. The actual administration of (rural) land relies on the village-based *chefs de terre* ("land chiefs"), who are responsible for allocating land among peasants. It is often the case that *chefs de terre* favour the members of their extended family, for example by refusing permits to dig a well to land users who are not related to them.

As part of a broader decentralisation policy, the management of land is to be transferred from the *chefs de terre* to newly created *conseils communaux* (communal councils), whose authority covers several villages. Understandably, this overlap in the lines of authority is already causing tensions with the *chefs de terre*, whose role in the new system may be severely reduced. Although *conseils communaux* and mayors are elected, the clientelistic political system will not provide them with sufficient legitimacy to operate without local support from *chefs de terre*, or from state administrations.

The problem lies in the crucial importance of land management in a context where the availability and location of good agricultural land is entirely dependent on climatic conditions. From year to year, the same plot can alternatively be fertile and then useless, depending upon variations in rainfall. This means that a formal and rigid titling programme would be irrelevant, and possibly a source of conflict. Moreover, the tension caused by competition over the use of land and resources (such as water) between farmers and herders also militates in favour of a negotiated solution.

In response to this situation, the Development Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been asked by the government of Mali to set up a mediation project, whose aim is to bring the various competing authorities together. These include the *chefs de terre*, local authorities and decentralised state services (such as the Water and Forest Authority). The meetings, organised at the regional level in order to avoid direct opposition between local land users, helped the participants understand each other's agenda. They resulted in a national workshop in May 2001, this time including herder and fishermen representatives.

This approach, based on the active participation of stakeholders, could be extended to similar contexts, as it helps reduce both violence and under-utilisation of land, and may be seen as a viable alternative to large-scale donor-promoted *plans fonciers ruraux* (rural land tenure titling and administration plans). However, the project faces several challenges, some of which may jeopardise its long-term success:

- an interruption in the consultation process would be catastrophic at this stage; the initiative can only be productive if it is sustained;
- it would be desirable to extend the level of the meetings progressively downwards in order to promote co-operation between those who are in daily contact;
- in the near future, environmental degradation may become a major constraint for the sustainability of shared land use and management agreements, especially if the legal uncertainty over forest management is protracted. The lack of clear regulations leads to widespread wood cutting, endangering the very existence of many forests.

More crucially, environmental degradation and land scarcity are also intimately linked to the failure of urban development to create enough jobs to absorb the flow of migrants. Despite this fact, most rural development programmes (Mali being no exception) are aimed at preventing rural-urban migration, without necessarily promoting off-farm rural activities.

Source: Interview with Florence Lasbennes, researcher at the Ecole d'agronomie de Rennes, and formerly co-ordinator in Mali of a rural mediation project promoted by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with the Malian Ministry for Rural Development.

Finally, participants in the seminar insisted on the importance of donors' sustaining their support to such dialogue processes, pointing to the dangerous frustration that may result from an early-interrupted conciliation or participatory programme.

Support Reformers

State commitment to reform is of course fundamental, but difficult to achieve through external influence. Donors may try to influence the process by helping the formation of “progressive” coalitions supporting participatory land policy strategies, be it land or tenure reform. As Putzel puts it in the Asian context:

“What is called for (...) is the formation of new political coalitions united around the cause of developing modern market economies based on principles of growth with a concern for equity and social justice. Negotiated reform will not work without a supportive state, just as financial markets and modern business need the regulatory framework only states can provide.” (Putzel, 2000)

Obviously, strategies to foster the formation of such coalitions should be adapted to local political contexts. For instance, in rural economies with scarce available assets, characterised by “political accumulation” relying on extortion and/or violence — e.g. Bangladesh — they could focus on supporting the autonomous political participation of poor households (including their demands for land reform). Empowering vulnerable communities to engage in negotiations will also lower the risk of their being mobilised into violent strife by “political entrepreneurs”. Donors may also support the de-linking of public investment from local patronage, as a strategy to weaken conservative forces and improve resource allocation. In certain cases, this may necessitate temporarily limiting the extent of decentralisation processes.

The seminar's discussion pointed to the need for future research to gather best practice in fostering the creation of pro-poor and pro-development coalitions, so as to mitigate land-related conflicts and bring about long-term and widely supported solutions.

4. Improve Co-ordination within and across Donor Agencies

Donor policies pertaining to *i*) development, *ii*) conflict settlement and emergency relief and *iii*) land policy respectively, have to various extents been developed within separate spheres. The resulting lack of operational co-operation between — and within — conflict settlement, relief and development programmes may have adverse consequences. As Fitzpatrick (2002) puts it:

“Brokering a peace agreement, but leaving behind a vacuum in institutional capacity, only encourages the return of conflict after the peacekeepers leave. Providing urgent humanitarian relief, but failing to integrate it with development aid, ignores the way that development assists in preventing future humanitarian crises. Providing development aid, but failing to establish the institutional conditions for sustainable development, is likely only to entrench a cycle of aid dependency and lead to allegations of waste and inefficiency.”

Greater co-ordination or even integration of policies — within and across bilateral and multilateral agencies — in conflict-stricken areas, as well as in other settings, was identified by experts participating in the seminar as a priority. They did stress that some co-ordination of policies is indeed taking place in the context of increasingly holistic aid projects. Obviously, the UN, as one of the donor agencies most involved in conflict-stricken areas, was a pioneer in broadening the scope of peace-keeping operations. Since 1995, “peace building programmes” have become the rule, although they face major capacity constraints. Other donor agencies have often been involved in the design and implementation of these programmes, and some of them have started to integrate long-term conflict prevention and “peace-building” in their own development programmes. Conversely, relief interventions tend to include long-term components (such as governance or gender). As for reducing the scope for conflict over land, the main attempt so far at building a coherent framework is the World Bank’s report *Land Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction* (2003), which draws upon the results of four regional conferences held in 2002 in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

However, it was regretted during the seminar discussions that most projects remain under the stewardship of a specific department or division, which does not always co-ordinate its actions with others working in the same area. This is even more pronounced between different agencies. For example, in the case of post-conflict management in El Salvador, one expert in the seminar underlined that for lack of long term vision, articulation and co-ordination, EC and USAID substantial assistance had had a disproportionately sub-optimal impact. Although it was successful in terms of peace-building, it resulted in numerous “disjointed and broken attempts”, with investments too heavy on logistics and planning and insufficient in terms of reaching people in rural areas. Conversely, where co-ordination takes place, it was reported as a key factor in successfully fostering peace through land reforms (see the case of post-war Cambodia in Box 7). In the light of those experiences, the following proposals were made:

- i) in conflict situations, to agree on a division of labour between departments and agencies, possibly under the supervision of one single agency;
- ii) in post-conflict settings — where a lesser degree of binding donors together may be needed — to establish a single “land contact” for all donors, so that interventions can be effectively monitored and contradictions, which could threaten stability, avoided.

**Box 7. Donor Co-ordination, Participatory Governance,
and the Reform of Land Institutions in Post-war Cambodia**

The chaos of post-war Cambodia left tens of thousands of families involved in land disputes with the military and the government, claiming land either seized or turned into concessions (for forestry or agriculture), most often in fighting areas that had been under continued military control for a long period of time. Frustrations seemed to reach a climax in the late 1990s, when demonstrations signalled a real threat to post-war peace. Local and international NGOs played a key role in bringing considerable media and donor attention to the issue.

A new Land Law was drafted in a transparent manner, by a working group of ministerial representatives, local and international NGOs — including human rights NGOs — with technical assistance from donors, notably the Asian Development Bank. In a departure from past practice, the law had new features such as the cadastral commission and programmes to put unoccupied state land to use. It clarified the jurisprudence on land rights. This law was eventually passed in August 2001.

After two years, dispute commissions are just beginning in the provinces and the land distribution programme just started being piloted via local government (accountable to the local populations). On the whole, the process is deemed a success: disputes are less violent than they were, tensions have lessened, public scrutiny has reduced the ability to resort to violence, etc. Key factors of success include:

- i)* framing responses in the governance realm, with mutual monitoring, dissemination of information, etc. ensuring a system of checks and balances;
- ii)* the participatory nature of the working group process;
- iii)* an unusual degree of co-ordination among donors. All worked under a single umbrella and through a lead agency, among others: AsDB on legal reform, World Bank on institutional development and land titling, GTZ on land management and information management.

Source: Based on comments by Malcolm Childress during the OECD/USAID informal experts' seminar on "Land, Conflict and Development" (19-20/6/03).

Further research might focus on generating a more harmonised approach to resettlement in post-conflict settings, in particular through an analysis of the operation of Property Commissions. More generally, it could also attempt to work out the implications of the DAC work on the harmonisation of donor practices (OECD, 2003*b*) for policies related to violent conflict generally, and land-related conflicts specifically.

5. Monitor and Contain Policy Incoherence with respect to Peace and Development Objectives

That greater coherence between donor policies on land policy and conflict prevention respectively is desirable is the very assumption on which this whole paper is based. It actually goes further than this by advocating that important synergies might be expected from "de-partitioning" those two areas. However, when trying to maximise the chances of building peace through adequate land-related policies in recipient countries, the coherence of the *full* range of donor policies has to be sought.

In that respect, participants in the seminar pointed to two types of policy incoherence that may impede the successful implementation of policies aiming to combine land policy and conflict prevention: *i)* incoherence between donors' explicit and implicit (typically political) objectives on the one hand, and *ii)* between the explicit objectives of land/conflict policies and other policies (e.g. trade) on the other hand.

Incoherence between Explicit and Implicit Objectives

Development and humanitarian policies are part of a broader foreign policy agenda for donor countries, and may therefore retain an element of self interest. Typically, non explicit, political objectives — that may stem from pressures by lobbies in the donor country — may clash with the explicit “altruistic” objectives (e.g. promoting peace, democracy or development). Such incoherence may hamper the achievement of the latter objectives, which in turn may pave the way to conflict, especially if the country is affected by tensions to begin with.

For instance, while aiming to support the redistribution of land to poor black people in Zimbabwe after the defeat of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) minority regime in 1980, the government of the former colonial power may actually have hampered the first phase of land reform in the 1980s (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Although it provided large amounts of funds to the Zimbabwean government for the purchase of land, it set conditions which made the task of distributing consistent plots almost impossible: all land purchased had to be paid at full market price to a willing seller. This allowed for a piecemeal redistribution of some of the poorest commercial land, which was however bought at high prices, and did not help create viable small commercial farms. More than the belief in the virtues of a market-based process, this approach may have resulted from the pressure of vested interests, such as white land owners, or multinational companies linked to the Rhodesian plantation sector (see Human Rights Watch, *ibid.*, and Pons-Vignon, 2001).

Further research may usefully document past and present occurrences of such clashes between explicit and implicit donor objectives, possibly within the envisaged review of donor practices at the intersection of land and conflict. Moreover, the above mentioned “Political Impact Assessments” may aim to assess and incorporate the monitoring of those elements early on in the project cycle.

Incoherence between Explicit Policy Objectives

More “classic” examples of incoherence with respect to the objective of promoting peace through adequate land-related policies will include potential clashes with other aid policies (e.g. private sector development), or “non-aid” policies on trade, migration, agriculture, fisheries, etc. However, as pointed out during the seminar, little data and literature are as yet available on the scope for improving the impact of policies aimed at preventing land-related conflicts within the broader agenda of “policy coherence for development”²⁵. Research topics for further consideration thus include:

- i) the impact of limiting market access for agricultural exports of developing countries on the livelihoods of farmers and farm workers, and the potential link with grievances and violent conflict;
- ii) the effect of changes in global commodity chains on the patterns of land use, and the related potential tensions;

25. On the broader agenda of policy coherence for development, see OECD (2003a).

- iii)* the dynamics of violence involving local populations (including workers) in areas host to foreign enterprise investment. For instance, it would be useful to explore, from a land perspective, the knowledge and experience accumulated by initiatives of tri-sector partnerships between firms, civil society and governments in mitigating the negative environmental and social impact of foreign direct investment, and maximising its development benefits through negotiation²⁶.

6. Consider Complementary Policies to Create New Economic and Social Opportunities

As underlined during the seminar, an economically viable agricultural sector, providing jobs and improving livelihoods, is the safest ground for peace, as it deprives political entrepreneurs of their prospective “cases” for violent mobilisation. Land policy and conflict management may thus be integrated into a wider framework designed to support the long term agrarian transformation of developing economies towards an increasingly productive rural economy.

Fostering agrarian transformation may require some land redistribution, or amending ongoing land reform programmes. However, such policies will succeed only if they seek to redress inequalities and support agricultural development, without threatening economic sustainability. Failure to do so would threaten peace, either by sharpening tensions and leaving them unaddressed, or by creating new ones due to fragile agricultural growth generating too few opportunities. Therefore, where political momentum allows for the implementation of reforms pertaining to land or agricultural development, donor technical assistance may play a useful role in supporting the creation of economically viable holdings by new small commercial farmers. This may include subsidies to facilitate the purchase of land allocated to redistribution, focused capacity building and empowerment programmes to help new landowners access other assets needed to cultivate their plot, coherent policies on credit, access to markets, etc.

Further research might:

- study alternative redistributive policies in contexts where land reform is not feasible, for example because of the scarcity of arable land;
- examine the specific gender dimensions and implications of land-related conflicts;
- carry out comparative studies, contrasting the situation of a limited number of countries sharing similar characteristics, but different evolutions, concerning the link between the dynamics of agrarian structure, categorical inequality and violent conflict;
- help devise new evaluation methods for conflict resolution projects that take account of long term aspects, as a move away from delivery-based evaluations, which foster a short-term perspective.

26. See for instance the issue of compensation for land acquisition within the framework of foreign direct investment projects in extractive industries, alluded to in *Business Partners for Development* (2001), a joint programme by the World Bank, CARE International and several multinational companies (www.bpd-naturalresources.org).

VI. CONCLUSION

Donors seeking to promote peace and development should tackle land issues in recipient countries more systematically, more carefully and in a more coherent manner²⁷. Conversely, land policy should carefully take sensitivities and grievances into account, in order to monitor the risks of conflict better. Two major difficulties nevertheless remain.

First, how to draw the line between conflict and violence? Promoting effective change and development is necessary for peace in the long run, but it implies accepting a certain degree of conflict, and working towards its resolution. Indeed, achieving peace while preventing change may actually generate more violence. As one expert in the OECD/USAID seminar put it:

“The challenge is to ensure that conflicts occur within normal [regulation] mechanisms so that they bring society forward, rather than create violence within it.”

What about situations where peaceful change seems impossible? Land being often at the heart of political, economic and symbolic power relations, change is bound to meet resistance from dominant vested interests. Where those interests can wield sufficient power to oppose reforms, conflict will almost certainly turn violent as the pressure for change rises.

The second difficulty relates to the capacity of donor agencies to deal with the politics of land in recipient countries, and to assume their role as political actors in a political process. Again quoting a participant in the seminar’s discussion:

“When land issues are politically exploited by politicians, how can donors influence or intervene? As donors, we are badly equipped to deal with the politics of land. When governments are forthcoming we have the tools, but when they are reluctant, what do we do?”

Indeed, intervening in land-related conflicts, even latent, means participating actively in shifting the balance of power within a given society. Therefore, it invariably implies taking sides, and cannot be looked at as a merely technical exercise²⁸. The efficiency of donor agencies’ intervention may thus depend on the clarity of the political guidance they receive.

27. This means introducing “land” in the various stages of monitoring and planning conflict prevention and post-conflict management. However, it was noted during the seminar that detailed implications need to be worked out, as “mainstreaming” may result in dilution (e.g. as arguably happened with “gender”).

28. As Da Câmara, Lethinen and Sherrif (2001) write in their review of the EU’s responses to countries affected by violent conflict: “In situations of crisis or [violent] conflict, all the actors involved in development interventions, irrespective of their provenance (i.e. whether they are non-governmental, governmental, international or local), play a part in the complex political game. How can a donor adopt a differentiated approach inside one country – often resulting in conflicts linked to ethnicity – without appearing to take sides in a conflict, interfere in state matters, or to favour a particular category of people? In Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan and Somalia, any chosen partner, local NGO, or civil-society group may be associated with a party in the crisis or seen as defending its constituency’s vested interests.”



PARTICIPANTS LIST / LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS

OECD-USAID INFORMAL EXPERTS' SEMINAR "LAND, CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT: WHAT ROLE FOR DONORS?"

SÉMINAIRE INFORMEL D'EXPERTS OCDE-USAID "TERRE, CONFLITS ET DÉVELOPPEMENT : QUEL RÔLE POUR LES BAILLEURS DE FONDS ? "

Room D, OECD Headquarters / Salle D, siège de l'OCDE
2 rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris

19 & 20 June 2003

Antonio **ALVAREZ**
Fundación para el Desarrollo
El Salvador

Mark **BERMAN**²⁹
Acting Chair, DAC Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation
Deputy Director, Democratic Institutions and Conflict Division (DICD)
Canadian International Development Agency
Canada

Jean-Louis **ARCAND**
Professeur
CERDI-CNRS
Université d'Auvergne
France

David **BLEDSE**
Deputy Director
Rural Development Institute
United States

Ian **BANNON**
Manager
Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit
The World Bank

Jean-Pierre **CHAUVEAU**
Directeur de recherche
Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)
Unité de Recherche Régulations foncières
France

Stephen **BARANYI**
Principal Researcher (Conflict Prevention)
The North-South Institute
Canada

Malcolm **CHILDRESS**
Associate Scientist
Land Tenure Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison
United States

29. Mark Berman was elected Chair of the *DAC Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation* in October 2003. He is now Director of DICD.

Geoff **BARNARD**
Senior Economist
International Monetary Fund
France

Klaus **DEININGER**
The World Bank
United States

Bettina **DUROCHER**
Canada

Isabel G. **LAVADENZ PACCIERI**
Senior Land Resources Specialist
The World Bank
United States

Daniel **FITZPATRICK**
Senior Lecturer
Law School
Australian National University
Australia

Pierre-Yves **LEMEUR**
Groupe d'Échange et de Recherche
Technologiques (GRET)
France

Christian **GRAEFEN**
Land Management, Rural Development
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische
Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
Germany

Philip **MIKOS**
Senior Officer
Rural Development & Agriculture Policies and
Strategies
B/4 - Environment and Rural Development
DG Development
European Commission

Lena **HERON**
Agriculture and Land Tenure Advisor
United States Agency for International Development
United States

Manuel **MORALES**
Consultant
Ecuador

Francesca **COOK**
Administrator, DAC Network on Conflict, Peace and
Development Co-operation
OECD Development Co-operation Directorate
France

Christian **OQUET**
Sous-Directeur Adjoint de la Co-opération
Économique
Ministère des Affaires Étrangères
France

Christopher **CRAMER**
Senior Lecturer in Political Economy
School of Oriental and African Studies
Department of Development Studies
United Kingdom

Adriana **HERRERA**
Land Tenure Service
Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)
Italy

Jean **DAUDELIN**
The Norman Paterson School of International
Affairs
Carleton University
Canada

Karim **HUSSEIN**
Administrateur principal
Sahel & West Africa Club
OECD
France

Michael **KIRK**
Philipps-University Marburg
Department of Economics
Institute for Co-operation in Developing Countries
Germany

Gabriele **KRUK**
German Technical Co-operation (GTZ)
Crisis Prevention and Conflict Transformation
Programme
Germany

Hubert **OUEDRAOGO**
LANDnet West Africa
Burkina Faso

Philippe **OSPITAL**
Chargé de mission
DCT/EPS (politique agricole et sécurité alimentaire)
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
France

Jean-Philippe **PLATTEAU**
Professeur
Centre de Recherche en Économie du
Développement (CRED)
Faculté des Sciences économiques, sociales et de
gestion – Université de Namur
Belgique

Nicolas **PONS-VIGNON**
Consultant
Centre de Développement de l'OCDE
France

Julian **QUAN**
Land Policy Advisor
Natural Resources Institute
(DFID Land Tenure Group contact)
Social Development Group
United Kingdom

Michael **ROESKAU**
Director
OECD Development Co-operation Directorate
France

Su Fei **TAN**
Research Associate
IIED Drylands Programme
United Kingdom

Nicholas **THEOTOCATOS**
Legal / IT Co-ordinator
German Forced Labour Compensation Programme
International Organisation for Migration
Switzerland

François **TAPSOBA**
Responsable du programme Foncier et ressources
naturelles
Comité Permanent Inter Etats de Lutte contre la
Sécheresse au Sahel (CILSS)
Burkina Faso

Jolyne **SANJAK**
Agriculture and Economic Growth Specialist
United States Agency for International Development
(USAID - LAC/RSD)
United States

Graham **SAUNDERS**
Sphere Project - Minimum Standards in Disaster
Response
Shelter & Community Infrastructure Advisor
Emergency Response Team
Catholic Relief Services
Switzerland

Mitchell A. **SELIGSON**
Professor of Political Science
Department of Political Science
University of Pittsburgh
United States

Henri-Bernard **SOLIGNAC LECOMTE**
Chef de l'unité de dialogue sur les politiques
Centre de Développement de l'OCDE
France

Roger **ZETTER**
Deputy Head
Department of Planning
School of Built Environment
Oxford Brookes University
United Kingdom

Mahamane **TOURE**
Chef du programme Foncier
Comité Permanent Inter Etats de Lutte contre la
Sécheresse au Sahel (CILSS)
Burkina Faso

Annelies **ZOOMERS**
Centre for Latin American Research and
Documentation (CEDLA)
The Netherlands

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