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Technology and Globalization: Modern-Era Constraints on Local Initiatives for Land Reform

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIFLD	American Institute for Labor Development
CIMMYT	International Corn and Wheat Improvement Center
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-governmental organization
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief

Summary / Résumé / Resumen

Summary

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section provides an outline of some of the major land reforms of this century. It includes a brief commentary on European feudalism of earlier centuries as well as the land conflict inherent in the American Civil War over slavery. Feudal land tenure systems and the struggle of peasants for rights to land were key factors in the French Revolution. And although the American Civil War was primarily about the abolition of slavery, it had a major land tenure component. Two major land reforms of the current century that have had various periods of active restructuring followed by periods of relative stability are those of Mexico and Russia. In both cases, there have been very fundamental changes within the past decade.

The second section provides a brief outline and discussion of the various levels of political action (at the international, national and local levels) for the initiation and implementation of land reforms. The role of the United States in the East Asian reforms-Japan, Taiwan Province of China and South Korea-as well as in those of Latin America are prime examples. But other countries were also involved in such reforms. Sweden was deeply involved in the land reforms of Ethiopia, and the French and the British tried to convert a variety of communal land systems to Western freeholds in a number of their African colonies. The Soviet Union and China were active in trying to influence the tenure structures of many of the newly independent nations upon the demise of colonialism. Likewise the specialized agencies of the United Nations and other international organizations, including both the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank, have held conferences, offered technical assistance, and used various forms of leverage and pressure in Asia, Africa and Latin America to encourage land policies considered to be more effective than those in existence at the time.

The third section looks at the globalization of markets and economies and the resulting negative effects that this new order can have, especially on local initiatives directed at promoting and implementing land reforms. This increasing globalization, linked as it is to modern technology, permits the interests and powers of other nations, as well as those of the economically powerful multinational corporations, to penetrate deeply into life and decisions at the local level. Likewise, these developments have made action and initiatives by local communities and interest groups increasingly difficult. All economies, even those of the largest nations that were largely self-sufficient a generation or two ago, are today highly dependent on international trade. And a corollary of this increased trade is that national economies are less amenable to direction by domestic economic policies. This makes life of local officials as well as of national legislators and executives increasingly difficult. People demand action to improve their economic conditions, but the actions necessary are only partially under the control of national officials. And local initiatives can rarely be fruitful without support at a higher level.

The final section attempts to suggest some prospective innovations at the national and international levels to make the economic playing field more level so that local initiatives for the promotion and implementation of land tenure changes can again be more fruitful. There are both private and public institutions operating transnationally which may require enforceable new codes of conduct in their economic policy implementation. We cannot, and would not want to, put the technological genie back into the bottle. We cannot, and would not want to, force a dismantling of all multinational corporations. But there is a desperate need for new and enforceable rules and procedures to be observed by giant multinational corporations as well as by some public international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Without such major changes in order to get a more level playing field, the effectiveness of local actions is not likely to be restored.

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Résumé

Ce document se divise en quatre parties. La première donne un aperçu de quelques-unes des importantes réformes agraires de ce siècle. Il comprend un bref commentaire sur la féodalité en Europe durant les siècles passés, ainsi que sur les querelles foncières liées à la guerre civile américaine de lutte contre l'esclavage. Le régime foncier féodal et la lutte des paysans pour le droit à la terre ont été les facteurs clés de la révolution française. Aussi, bien que la guerre civile américaine fut au départ dirigée contre l'esclavage, il apparaît que la composante "régime foncier" ait joué un rôle important. Les deux réformes foncières qui, au cours du siècle, ont eu des périodes de restructuration active variées, suivies de périodes d'une relative stabilité sont celles du Mexique et de la Russie. Dans les deux cas, il y a eu des changements fondamentaux ces dix dernières années.

La seconde partie donne les grandes lignes et une discussion sur les différents niveaux de l'action politique (aux niveaux international, national et local) dans la mise en train de l'exécution des réformes agraires. Le rôle des Etats-Unis dans les réformes de l'Asie de l'Est-au Japon, Taiwan et Corée du Sud-comme celles de l'Amérique latine en est un exemple de premier ordre. Mais d'autres pays ont également été engagés dans de telles réformes. La Suède a été profondément engagée dans les réformes agraires réalisées en Ethiopie. Les Français et les Britanniques ont essayé de transformer des systèmes communaux variés d'exploitation de la terre en propriété foncière libre de type occidental dans certaines de leurs colonies africaines. L'Union Soviétique et la Chine ont essayé activement d'influencer la structure foncière de plusieurs nations nouvellement indépendantes, après la démission du colonialisme. De même, les agences spécialisées des Nations Unies et autres Organisations internationales, dont la FAO et la Banque mondiale ont tenu des conférences, offert de l'assistance technique et utilisé des formes variées de contraintes et pressions en Asie, en Afrique et en Amérique latine, pour encourager des politiques foncières considérées comme plus efficaces par rapport à celles existantes à l'époque.

La troisième partie traite de la mondialisation des marchés et des économies, ainsi que des effets négatifs, que ce nouvel ordre économique peut entraîner, spécialement sur les initiatives locales orientées vers la promotion et la mise en oeuvre des réformes agraires. La mondialisation croissante, liée à la technologie moderne comme elle l'est, permet aux intérêts et forces des autres nations, ainsi qu'à ceux des sociétés multinationales économiquement fortes, de pénétrer profondément la vie et les décisions des gens au niveau local. Ces développements ont progressivement rendu difficiles toute action, décision et initiative des communautés locales, et des groupes d'intérêt. Toutes les économies, y compris celles des toutes grandes nations qui étaient largement autosuffisantes il y a une ou deux générations, sont aujourd'hui très dépendantes du commerce international. La conséquence de cette expansion du commerce est que les économies nationales cadrent de moins en moins avec la politique économique des pays. Cette situation rend la vie de plus en plus difficile aux responsables locaux, aux législateurs nationaux et aux cadres exécutifs. Les gens demandent une action pour améliorer leurs conditions économiques, mais les actions nécessaires sont partiellement sous le contrôle des fonctionnaires. Les initiatives locales peuvent difficilement aboutir sans le soutien du plus haut niveau.

La dernière partie tente de suggérer les innovations éventuelles aux niveaux national et international pour rendre le champ économique équilibré, afin que les initiatives locales de promotion et de mise en oeuvre de changements du régime foncier puissent ainsi être plus productives.

Les institutions publiques comme privées opèrent au niveau transnational. Cela pourrait entraîner l'application de nouveaux codes de conduite dans l'exécution de leur politique économique. Nous ne pouvons, ni ne voulons, obliger un démantèlement de toutes les sociétés multinationales. Il y a, cependant, un terrible besoin de nouvelles règles obligatoires que les sociétés multinationales géantes se devraient d'observer tout comme des institutions internationales publiques tels le Fonds monétaire international et la Banque mondiale. L'efficacité des actions locales n'est pas prête de revenir sans ces changements majeurs visant à aplanir le terrain de jeu.

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Resumen

El presente estudio se divide en cuatro secciones. En la primera sección se describen algunas de las más importantes reformas agrarias de nuestro siglo, y se observa brevemente al feudalismo europeo de siglos anteriores y los conflictos relacionados con la tierra durante la guerra civil norteamericana. Los sistemas de tenencia de tierras feudales y la lucha de los campesinos por derechos a la tierra fueron factores claves en la Revolución Francesa. Y, aunque la guerra civil norteamericana tuvo como objetivo primordial la abolición de la esclavitud, la cuestión de la tenencia de la tierra fue otro componente importante. Las reformas de México y Rusia han sido muy significativas en el corriente siglo, experimentando cambios fundamentales en la pasada década. Ambas han atravesado por varias fases de reestructuración activa seguidas de fases de relativa estabilidad.

En la segunda sección se describen y discuten los varios niveles de acción política (internacional, nacional y local) para la formulación e implementación de reformas agrarias. El rol de los Estados Unidos en las reformas de Asia del Este-Japón, Taiwan y Corea del Sur-así como también en las de América Latina, es dado como un ejemplo importante. Hay otros países que también se involucraron en tales reformas. Por ejemplo, Suecia se envolvió profundamente en la reforma agraria de Etiopía. En algunas de sus colonias africanas, tanto Francia como Inglaterra trataron de convertir varios regímenes comunales de tierras en feudos francos de tipo occidental. Por su parte, la Unión Soviética y China intentaron activamente influenciar las estructuras de tenencia de tierras de las nuevas naciones independientes que emergieron luego del fin del colonialismo. Asimismo, las agencias especializadas de la ONU y otras organizaciones internacionales, incluyendo la FAO y el Banco Mundial, han auspiciado conferencias, ofrecido asistencia técnica, y utilizado varias formas de influencia y presión en torno de sus programas de asistencia en Asia, Africa y América Latina para promover políticas de acceso a la tierra más efectivas que las existentes.

La tercera sección examina la globalización de los mercados y economías junto con los resultados negativos que este nuevo orden podría tener, especialmente, para las iniciativas locales dirigidas a promover e implementar las reformas agrarias. La creciente globalización, conectada como está a la tecnología moderna, permite que otras naciones y las económicamente poderosas empresas multinacionales, penetren profundamente en la vida y decisiones a nivel local. Asimismo, el proceso de globalización ha hecho cada vez más difícil la acción de las comunidades locales y los grupos de interés. Las economías de todos los países, incluyendo a aquellas más desarrolladas que eran autosuficientes una o dos generaciones atrás, hoy dependen del comercio internacional. Como correlato de esto, las economías nacionales ahora son dictadas por las políticas económicas globales, haciendo más difícil la vida de los oficiales locales, legisladores y ejecutivos nacionales. La sociedad civil exige acciones para mejorar las condiciones económicas reinantes, pero dichas acciones ya no están bajo el entero control de las administraciones nacionales. Las iniciativas locales no pueden ser fructíferas si no cuentan con el apoyo de niveles más altos.

La última sección brinda algunas sugerencias sobre innovaciones a nivel nacional e internacional para nivelar el campo económico y que las iniciativas locales se encuentren nuevamente en posición de promover e implementar fructíferamente cambios en la tenencia de la tierra. Las instituciones transnacionales, tanto privadas como públicas, requieren nuevos códigos de conducta para la implementación de políticas económicas. No podemos, ni tampoco deseáramos, descartar la importancia de la tecnología. No podemos, ni tampoco deseáramos, forzar el desmantelamiento de todas las empresas multinacionales. Pero hay una necesidad imperiosa de formular e implementar nuevas reglas y procedimientos viables a ser respetados por las grandes empresas multinacionales e instituciones públicas internacionales como el Fondo Monetario Internacional y el Banco Mundial. Si no se producen cambios de gran magnitud como los mencionados, la probabilidad de restaurar la efectividad de las acciones locales es mínima.

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Introduction

Land tenure reform is not a modern phenomenon, nor has reform been confined to developing nations. But recent technological and institutional changes have brought about unprecedented shifts in the options for socio-economic and political action. These changes have at times affected the possibilities for effective political and economic action at local and even national levels-actions necessary to implement and preserve the benefits of past reforms or to introduce new reform measures. And, of course, there remains the imbalance of political power and influence within many nation states, which has been and remains the primary deterrent to the actions required for equal distribution of resources and opportunities.

The first section of this paper outlines some of the major land reforms of this century, with a note on the earlier transformation of European feudalism. Next, some possible sources of political action (at the international, national and local levels) are considered for the initiation and implementation of reforms. The third section examines the globalization of markets and economies, and the negative effects this new order can have-especially on local initiatives dealing with land tenure reforms. The final section suggests some prospective national and international institutional innovations to level the economic playing field; this is followed by the paper's conclusions.

Historical Landmarks

The European feudal system of several centuries ago is today an anachronism. Although comprising political, social and economic institutions, it was fundamentally an agrarian system built on the control of land. Eventually that system conflicted with the evolving goal of creating strong nation states, proved ill-equipped to respond to the requirements of expanding markets and too inflexible to accommodate the increased use of capital, and failed to meet the needs of human beings' evolving self-conception.

Yet despite its inadequacies, injustices and rigidities by present standards, the feudal system was an adaptation to the times. Growing out of a crumbling and disintegrating world empire, it organized people according to strict class structures with mutual obligations between classes, thereby assuring some degree of cohesion, internal harmony and security from potential enemies external to the feudal manor. But feudal structure was inconsistent with the requirements of changing from an agrarian system to an industrial society. The various attempts at reforming these agrarian systems, and their eventual transformation, define major landmarks in the economic history of the European states. Feudal land tenure systems and peasants' struggle for land rights were key factors in the French Revolution.

The history of the United States is not devoid of the land reform experience. The American Civil War was a conflict over land as well as slavery (Conrad and Meyer, 1964). The Homestead Act of 1862, which provided full title to 160 acres of public land after five years of residence and evidence of improvements, was passed only after many years of debate. The southern states were threatened by a free-land policy

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