Agricultural Labour as Stakeholders in Land Reform: A Review

Jennifer Leavy*, Paola Termine** and Gabriel Rugalema**

*Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex
**Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)

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Most often agricultural workers and labourers have not been favourably considered in and benefited by land reform processes, while this adds to their marginalisation and it is also one of the reasons why land reform is not always successful in terms of poverty reduction. This paper examines the extent to which agricultural workers/labour are stakeholders in land reform, drawing conclusions from case study illustrations and theoretical literature about the ways different land reform processes impact on agricultural workers/labour. By paying adequate attention to this significant group of poor and vulnerable people, and ensuring provision of appropriate complementary inputs and services, land reform processes can effect poverty reduction by protecting property rights, improving productivity and conditions of labour and contributing to sustainable rural development.

1. Introduction

Agricultural labour has not been considered stakeholder in land reform in spite of the fact that land is of critical importance for poor people’s livelihoods in rural areas. It provides income and employment for a large majority of people in developing countries – more than 70 per cent of the world’s poor people live and work in rural areas in agriculture and agriculture-related activities (World Bank, 2003). Land also has historical and spiritual significance, with control over land bound up with ethnic identity, political and economic power. Land issues can be heavily gendered - patrilineal systems dominate, with land and/or property rights held and transferred through men. It is no surprise then that the poorest people tend to be landless and living in rural areas. For this group especially, labour is often the only asset they possess and access to labour markets is crucial as their only source of income.

Moreover, rural labour provides the nexus between environmental, social and economic sustainability, poverty reduction and food security. The importance of rural employment for poverty reduction cannot be overestimated, given that agricultural workers amount to 450 million worldwide, and that labour is often the only productive asset they own. Indeed, given its importance in relative and absolute terms, it is surprising that rural
labour is not central to agricultural and rural development policies, including land reform. Instead, policies aimed at the creation of sustainable employment opportunities in farm and off-farm activities are often absent. Traditionally, agriculture and rural development policies have focused on agricultural growth with a focus on the production side, and on land and capital, often without a careful evaluation of their impact on the livelihoods and vulnerability of the largest group of poor in the rural areas: the workers, including the landless and wage-dependent small farmers. However, successful sustainable development and successful agrarian reform require that both small farmers and workers are given considerably more attention as distinct groups, each with its own political, economic and social needs and contributions; that both groups figure in sustainable rural development strategies and programmes; and that more support is given to building and strengthening links between these groups in the interests of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

For the purpose of this paper, we will use the terms agricultural workers/labour interchangeably to mean: women and men who hire out their labour for cash or in-kind payment, or reciprocal systems of labour exchange in agriculture and related industries, under a variety of contractual arrangements, including permanent, temporary, casual and contract work. Agricultural labour includes also the farmers who rely on the income from hiring out their labour for some part of the year.

It is important to acknowledge that agricultural workers are not an homogenous group, but on the contrary, they are different stakeholders in land reform. For example casual workers may be own a small plot of land which provides a source of their subsistence; permanent workers are often landless, sometime with access to a piece of land for personal consumption on the farm that employs them. Workers vary also in terms of their ability to be represented, as permanent workers in big plantation farming making up the bulk of membership of agricultural workers’ unions representing, while the majority of workers are not unionisable.

2. Land reform and poverty reduction

Rural landlessness can be a good predictor for poverty and hunger; the poorest people are usually land-poor, either landless or lacking secure rights to land. Thus, access to land is a crucial factor in eradicating food insecurity and rural poverty (FAO, 2003). Improved access to land can potentially improve household food security if it allows a household to increase food consumption. In addition, the ability to produce and sell surplus food or other cash crops can increase household incomes. Providing secure tenure can also enhance an individual or household’s asset base, creating incentives for investment and improving labour productivity. Using land as collateral can mean access to credit, and there are clear linkages between control over land and control over labour assets, for example through reciprocal exchange and linked contractual arrangements such as sharecropping.

In most developing countries, however, land ownership remains highly unequal, with Gini coefficients ranging from 0.51 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 0.54 in South East Asia to
0.78 in Latin America. This means that the benefits of agricultural growth are generally captured by the large landowners, and that it potentially delivers fewer benefits to poor people. Growth translates into poverty reduction through increased rural incomes brought about by improved productivity in land and labour, including the generation and upgrading of employment. However, it is also important to note that agricultural growth can be less or more pro-poor, depending on which income group it benefits more relatively to others. For example, labour-intensive or smallholder-based agricultural growth are considered to benefit more the poor through the creation of employment and spur to local markets. The impacts can be both direct and indirect. The latter through multiplier effects of the increased purchasing power of agricultural incomes in rural areas. Agrarian and land reforms to address land inequalities therefore matter crucially for rural development and poverty reduction, and benefits of more egalitarian land distribution go beyond those associated with economic growth. Empirical work suggests strong correlations with greater peace and social cohesion (Deininger, 2003). While access to land and agrarian reforms are crucial elements for sustainable rural development, agrarian support services, technologies, skills and management training and investments are crucial to exploit the land effectively. Both for landless and near landless, economic diversification is essential for food security, poverty reduction, stimulate the rural economy and improve living standards.

How can land redistribution bring about poverty reduction and, especially given that they are usually the poorest group, improve workers’ livelihoods and incomes? As discussed in more detail in section 6 of this paper, land redistribution programmes have had mixed outcomes. Programmes have tended to pursue aims of equity and social justice, as well as driving agricultural production and productivity (DFID 2004). Both are important, and indeed, growth and redistribution are not incompatible (Putzel 2000). However, for land reform to be successful in reaching target beneficiaries it is essential to strengthen rights, especially those of poor and vulnerable groups, otherwise they run the risk of being left behind. Taking a pro-poor approach to land also acknowledges the significance of local social and political relations with respect to land ownership and access (Daley and Hobley, 2005)

A crucial dimension of rural institutions that tends to be glossed over, or at least not explicitly addressed, in the land reform literature is that, especially in rural areas, land and labour are inextricably linked. Agricultural production is constrained by both land and labour, and exchanges or transactions in land markets can be tied (or ‘interlocked’) with transactions in other markets including, in the case of sharecropping, labour. In many cases an employer acts as a patron, providing a range of goods and services, including land in a sharecropping arrangement. Interlocking markets can arise because of high transaction costs (including asymmetric information) or missing or incomplete markets for credit and insurance (see, for example, Bardhan, 1984, and Hayami and Otsuka, 1993). Such relationships can be seen as exploitative, for example in the case of debt bondage (interlocking of land and capital). However, in less extreme instances, landless labourers can access land and other resources through these arrangements and in turn the employer gains access to inputs and other family labour brought in by the tenant,
as well as coping with the problem of seasonal availability of labour (White and Leavy, 2001).

3. Complexities of rural/agricultural labour

Among the poorest people are the young, landless and living in rural areas. This group includes waged agricultural workers working on plantations and larger commercial farms, as well as those labourers who make their living working less formally for smallholder farmers. The former, described by the recent FAO-ILO-IUF study, are “the 450 million women and men who labour as waged workers in agriculture and who are at the heart of the commercial food production system …These waged workers form over 40% of the world’s agricultural labour force and, along with their families, are part of the core rural poor in many countries” (FAO-ILO-IUF 2005). If a careful scrutiny of rural labour is done, the most distinguishable likely characteristics are: poor, landless or with small plots of lands, migrants, young, with low levels of education, unable to find other jobs elsewhere in the economy, and with limited access to power and decision-making. In other words most agricultural workers are tied to the land in which they work. The trend towards a shift to wage employment is much faster than the needed policy adjustments to ensure adequate policies, like social security, among others.

Waged agricultural workers/labourers do not own or rent the land they work on, nor the tools and equipment used. In this respect they are a group distinct from farmers and need specific attention and resources, particularly related to decent employment and living conditions so that farms and plantations can be sustainable workplaces (FAO-ILO-IUF 2005). However, especially given the overlaps between workers and smallholder farmers, they have many similar needs and common concerns related to food security. They are engaged in similar activities, share the same environment and often come from same household. Moreover, many smallholders are also dependent on wage employment for their livelihoods, therefore share workers’ issues.

It is clear then that agricultural labour refers to a non-homogenous group with varied contractual arrangements. Labourers can be migrant workers, indigenous rural workers, and/or smallholder farmers who earn significant portion of income off-farm. Contracts are often not formalised and encompass permanent, casual, seasonal, piece-rate and in-kind arrangements, and reciprocal systems of labour exchange. These workers labour in the crop fields, orchards, glasshouses, livestock units, and primary processing facilities to produce the world’s food and fibres. They are employed on small- and medium-sized farms as well as large industrialized farms and plantations and their employment relationship can be it with a farmer, farming or plantation company, or labour contractor or sub-contractor (FAO-ILO-IUF 2005).

Women in wage employment have more difficult issues: not visible in unions - which are male-dominated - they have lower salaries, social and economic conditions, and their work and contribution are often not recognised.
Broad processes of change in agriculture, characterised by increased commoditisation, liberalisation and globalisation, are affecting the nature of people’s relations around resources, production processes and the nature of land-based inequalities (Daley and Hobley, 2005). These processes have direct implications for rural labourers. The private sector has become an increasingly influential force in shaping agriculture and its development impact. National and regional agrifood markets in developing countries are changing fast. There is growing concentration in food processing and retail sectors with a significant role played by supermarkets and private, as well as public, standards for production, food quality and safety, and labour conditions. This has impacts on and implications for rural livelihoods and communities. Private sector development, i.e. commercial agriculture and transnational corporations and food chains, have led to increased production of higher value crops for global markets, changing work patterns and increasing ‘flexibilisation’ of labour.¹

Against the backdrop of increasing globalisation and commercialisation in agriculture an important change is the growing casualisation of agricultural labour. More workers are employed in the farming sector than ever before, and the number of casual workers is increasing at a faster rate than permanent workers. The growing significance of agricultural employment was discussed during the Electronic Forum on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002: “There are more workers in wage employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time. The share of waged employment in agriculture than at any time.” As the number of small-scale farmers shrinks and the agricultural sector is increasingly composed by larger scale farming, more and more produce is grown by agricultural labourers and outgrowers in an industrial agriculture sector. This increases the percentage and number of agricultural workers versus the number of small farmers, and owners of the land (Hurst, 2002, SARD E-Forum)².

What are the implications of this trend in terms of employment conditions and rural livelihoods? The lack of adequate policy reflects in insufficient levels of job safety and security. Looking at livelihoods at the household level, many rural households in developing countries depend on a ‘portfolio’ of income generating activities. As well as smallholder and subsistence farming, this can include agricultural wage labour on plantations and large commercial farms or working for fellow smallholder farmers, with payments in cash or in-kind. Rural households also both hire in and hire out labour. The hiring of labour is widespread even among low-income smallholder households, particularly to meet seasonal demand for cultivation and harvesting tasks (Duncan and Howell, 1992). The same smallholder households are likely to hire out labour at specific times of the year, which beyond representing an alternative source of income could have

¹ See [www.regoverningmarkets.org](http://www.regoverningmarkets.org)
negative short and long terms effects as labour is withdrawn from productive uses in the family farm.

More generally, employment is central to the objective of poverty reduction. Labour is often the only asset possessed by poor people and therefore access to labour markets is of vital importance because hiring out their labour is often their only source of income. Small scale farmers often also depend on hiring out their labour as an essential and sometimes principal source of income at least at specific times of the year. Farm workers incomes also have important multiplier effects in local rural economies. For many people, the only way to improve productivity of their main asset is to improve the functioning of rural labour markets – this also means taking labour concerns into consideration alongside access (and terms of access) to land, given the clear links between land, labour and livelihoods outlined above.

Taking into account the many millions of the smallholder farmers worldwide who need to supplement their income with intermittent and seasonal work on farms/plantations, as well as those working as agricultural labourers on large and small farms, we are looking at a sizeable proportion of rural poor people potentially affected by land redistribution / land reform policies.

4. Why have agricultural labourers tended to be invisible to policy-makers

Despite representing a large share of farmers, wage-dependent smallholders are rarely addressed by agricultural programmes targeted at small farmers (FAO-ILO-IUF). The same report notes that “waged agricultural workers…remain largely invisible to policy-and decision-makers”. So too has there been a similar tendency for agricultural workers of all kinds to be marginalised and disadvantaged in land reform. This is also linked to the fact that agricultural labourers work for powerful farmers, who may have the interest to keep them disengaged from policy processes. Yet this is precisely the group that land reform is often intended to benefit.

Agricultural workers/labourers are among the poorest workers (see FAO-ILO-IUF: 26). Many agricultural workers are only poorly protected by national labour law and codes, either because they are explicitly excluded (legislation often does not apply to agricultural workers) or because existing laws de facto cannot be applied to the agricultural sector (for example, because employment categories do not match). Working conditions are generally poor in agriculture, especially for waged workers, and even worse for unorganised workers, and child labour is widespread. Forced child labour, slavery and trafficking are not uncommon. ³

Reasons for this marginalisation lie in part in the hiring and contractual arrangements for agricultural workers/labourers. The sector is

³ See reports by ILO-IPEC at www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec
“…characterised by high levels of non-permanent work (temporary, seasonal, casual, migrant and contract) and female employment, with women often concentrated in the most labour-intensive and insecure forms of work. Long working hours and hazardous conditions are also common.” (Smith et al 2004:1).

The most ‘invisible’ of workers are those in increasingly casualised positions, employed by third-party contractors, who do not appear in national labour statistics and have no rights because they are not seen as being employees (Stephanie Barrientos, 2006: pers. comm.). The same is true for those labouring ‘informally’ on smaller-scale farms. Labour codes and laws, while they can be successful in raising employment standards of permanent workers, often neglect conditions men and women face in insecure forms of employment. This can constitute a large proportion of the overall agricultural/horticultural labour force. “For codes to deliver substantive changes in working conditions, they need to ensure that the rights of all workers are protected, including those of marginalised workers.” (Smith et al 2004:1).

However, people in less formalised and insecure forms of employment tend also to lack access to legal institutions and processes, and therefore are not aware of their rights. High fragmentation of the labour force in agriculture, especially in small farms aggravates this problem, as these workers are not easily “unionisable”. Some of the agricultural workers unions have in the past decade tried to open up in order to broaden their memberships beyond permanent workers, also to respond to the steady decline in membership they were experiencing as a result of casualisation of labour, but overall these are the exceptions and a new or alternative model of workers’ membership-based association needs to be found. The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF) - to which many national agricultural trade unions affiliate - has been working with the International Land Coalition (ILC) to research and develop guidelines to draw policy makers’ attention to agricultural workers/labourers as stakeholders in agrarian reform processes, and potential transition measures. Core ILO standards (freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, no discrimination in employment, abolition of forced labour, elimination of child labour) should apply to all workers, including workers’ right to freedom of association and collective bargaining as embodied in ILO conventions 87 and 98. These need to be embodied in law as well as protected and realised in practice.

Given the peculiarity of the organisation of production in rural areas and its impact on labour, it is essential to identify alternative ways to strengthen workers’ organisations so as to broaden their membership base to include casual, contract and informal workers, so as to reinforce their action as development institutions at community level and enhance their participation in agrarian reform and rural development. The key constraints faced by workers’ organizations include: low capacity – skills, knowledge, staff, resources – in terms of broader participation in rural issues (such as land reform, extension, agricultural technologies, provision of credit and other services, health and safety); declining membership; low human, financial, and organizational capacity; weak or no influence over policies, partners, and rules and regulations; weak financial sustainability.
For these same reasons agricultural workers/labourers are marginalised in land reform processes. For example, with large scale structural changes in African rural and agricultural economies, there is a “history of neglect” with regard to appropriate support, with farm workers increasingly subject to evictions, and as a result engage in occupation of farmlands (Atkinson et al 2004). Papers presented at the Land in Africa Conference highlight recurring themes of “inadequate protection of farm worker rights against eviction and substandard farm worker housing on commercial farms. Inadequate protection of rights of citizens and communities against certain traditional authorities” (Kirwijila, in Quan et al, 2004). Other studies point to the erosion of women’s rights to land and their progressive marginalisation (Redwood, 2002, SARD E-FORM).

5. From invisible labourers to active stakeholders.

This section explores how rural labourers can be empowered to play a more active role. Land reform can benefit or disadvantage agricultural workers/labour, potentially impacting on use, productivity and conditions of labour, access to land, property rights and access to resources and employment opportunities. Even though agricultural workers and labourers work directly on land and contribute to its productivity, they often do not benefit from land reform (FAO-IUF-IL0, 2005). This is important both in terms of the success of land reform in terms of poverty reduction and for protecting vulnerable groups from the potential negative impacts of land reform. If land reform does indeed ignore this significant group of rural stakeholders, the result may be that workers lose their jobs, housing and livelihoods, and in some cases even the right to work as migrant labour in a country. If this is the case, land reform could not be considered successful.

The range of land reform options that have been implemented in different countries respond to different concerns and situations and may lead to potentially very diverse results. Below we present a summary of the diverse typologies of land reform, to serve as a reference for the analysis.

Land reform is generally aimed at obtaining a more equitable distribution of and access to land through the redistribution of rights to land to those that were not entitled, especially the poor. Three major types of intervention by the state can be distinguished as:

- **Legally imposed controls and prohibitions**, e.g. nationalization, collectivization, restitution, redistribution, ceilings on land holdings, land taxes etc;
- **Inducements or market-assisted incentives**, e.g. privatization of state farms, state grants to acquire land, credit schemes, and
- **Land tenure reform** - ‘a planned change in the terms and conditions on which land is held, used and transacted’, e.g. through converting informal rights to formal

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Different approaches to land reform can also be classified according to the following categories:

**Redistributive land policies**: including rapid redistribution, useful in very polarised agrarian systems where a very small percentage of owners controls most of the land; agrarian reform, a far-reaching state intervention to improve the agrarian structure by means of confiscation or expropriation; or introduction by the state of a specific land regime with restrictions on ownership and alienation rights. These policies are usually more successful in the case of large properties working with farmers or sharecroppers who managed the entire production process than in the case of enterprises with salaried or quasi-salaried workers. Expropriation is used as a fight against illegal appropriations.

**Market interventions**: used to respond to economic crises in the sector and unviability of large properties, on the assumption that small producers working in more diversified production systems are more resilient. This type of land reform can be easier to implement and less controversial than the redistributive policies. The *Market Assisted Land Reform* policies of the World Bank are based on the “willing buyer – willing seller” principle, and proved to be not a very effective/viable approach to land redistribution.

**Continuous interventions**: for the management of agrarian structures, like land market regulatory mechanisms to complement the traditional mechanisms of farming economies.

**Policies for the recognition of land rights**: including i) recognition of de facto rights acquired in the course of time, through “prescription acquisitive” legal instruments, and ii) granting of land titles by the state.

At the country level there tend to be no clear policies and guidelines on options available to agricultural workers/ labourers in land reform or redistribution, and experience is mixed. In some cases, legislation and policy on land redistribution, compensation and accommodation for evicted farm workers are largely lacking. In others, for example the South African white paper on land reform 1996, workers are given land on farms where they worked.

Unions potentially have a key role to play in organising and representing agricultural workers and ensuring their rights are upheld during land reform processes. However, unionisation can be difficult given the fragmented nature of most of the rural labour force. Traditionally, this has meant agricultural workers have weak bargaining power and are socially and politically marginalised. Where they do exist, agricultural workers unions are often constrained in addressing workers rights in processes of land reform. These are in part due to limitations of unions’ (organisational, political, financial, technical) capacity to effectively represent and champion members’ interests. This can be seen in countries such as Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, where significant
changes in land ownership have resulted in “marginalization and dramatic losses and negative consequences for farm workers” (FAO-IUF-ILO, 2005:59).

Potential shortcomings in Unions’ ability to adequately represent the interests of rural workers could be ascribed to the difficulties in extending traditional union activities to the agricultural sector and the rural setting. In particular, traditional educational programmes, usually provided by unions to members, as well as membership fee collection, may not be relevant to the kinds of working conditions rural workers face – most notably casual employment. In terms of representing rural workers, unions and other rural institutions need to ensure that the services they provide, including mechanisms for representing agricultural workers/labour, such as collective bargaining, are appropriate to the specific problems they face, for example: insecurity of land tenure; limited access to credit; and limited scope for self-organisation.

It is important, too, to remember that local governments and officials are not “neutral actors” in the development process. Local elites play a role in mediating access to land, and not always in the interests of the poorest people. Poor people need support in pursuing land claims, especially if the claims are not considered locally to be “socially legitimate”. In many cases this is particularly true of women’s rights to land. Even where women’s interest groups are organised and vocal, there can be discrepancies between what is agreed in principle and what is put into policy practice. Uganda is a case in point. Here, women’s groups were effective in arguing for changes to the new land bill that would enhance women’s rights. However, the changes were not reflected in the published law. This became known as the “lost amendment” (Daley and Hobley, 2005).

Market-based land reform is typically difficult to access by workers as they tend to lack the necessary capital and/or access to credit to purchase land at market and above-market prices. Added to this is the propensity of land transactions to be institutionally/administratively overly-burdensome, acting as further constraint to agricultural workers/labourers. This is illustrated by the case studies outlined later in section 6 of this review.

Where has land reform benefited agricultural labour/workers? On the whole there has been a tendency for labour issues to be ignored despite their importance and intrinsic link to land. However, land reform that redistributes land to former tenants, like reforms in Japan, Republic of Korea, or Taiwan, for example, appears to have better results in terms of productivity and poverty reduction than those that promote farm workers to owner operator status. As highlighted in the examples below, farm workers often do not have experience and/or skills in farm management and so are unable to plan and develop their farms. The same is true of reforms where local communities play a role, as is the case in The Philippines. Here, Latifundia reform involved giving workers land – but workers needed capacity building in management skills to be effective (FAO, 2003:15).

Historically, land reform in Latin America has gone hand-in-hand with the introduction of labour laws. Since the 1930s labour protections have been substantial and labour laws ‘notoriously rigid’ (Taylor, 2004). This can be put down to the strength of Labour Movements in the region and strong working class militancy based on early creation of
successful labour unions, especially in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. The rural labour movement in North-east Brazil has its origins in the rural mobilisation of the Peasant Leagues in the 1960s.

From farm labour to move from invisible elements to active stakeholders in land reform and rural development processes there are therefore three dimensions that need to be fulfilled:

1. An enabling policy environment and legal framework, including land reform and legal rights
2. Active advocacy for workers’ interests and needs, by stronger unions, member-based organisations, and grassroots institutions and social movements
3. Resource mobilisation and targeted interventions to create a level playing field to enable the poor to acquire and exploit the land.

6. *Land reform in practice – some case studies*

The following selected case study examples illustrate policy and programmes that have had successful outcomes and those that have not succeeded. They also highlight the complexities involved in policy reforms, while showing that land reform can be implemented to the advantage of poor agricultural workers.

6.1 **Southern Africa**

Two examples from Southern Africa – Zimbabwe and South Africa – show two very different approaches to land reform in two countries with similar agrarian structures.

**Zimbabwe – land reform that never was**

- There was no clear strategy on land reform in Zimbabwe. Land invasion shaped the policy instead of having a policy-led land redistribution
- No enabling/supportive policy environment
- The needs of farm workers were ignored
- Many farm workers ended up landless, jobless and homeless
- Increase in nutrition and food insecurity
- Intensification of poverty and hopelessness


How are farm workers being included in the resettlement process? A study of five commercial farms in Mashonaland, Zimbabwe, illustrates the degree to which the
livelihoods of the commercial farm workers are linked to “the fate of the farm” (Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe, 2001:18). Marginalisation of farm workers in the land reform process means that the impact of land reform on farm workers has been on the whole unfavourable. Already historically a vulnerable social group, the loss of jobs and livelihoods, housing, and access to social services by farm workers with land transfer to black small and large commercial farmers has led to displacement, lower production and food shortage crises. This has been described as a ‘progression from a state of poverty for some (not all) to a state of chronic poverty” (Sachikonye, 2003:6).

Far from benefiting agricultural workers, the loss of rights of (former) land-owners can have knock-on effects to the detriment of workers. For example, where landowners remain on their farms, lack of access to credit for the farmer also affects workers (see Box 1) in terms of their own access to credit and also work. Seasonal workers are the worst hit as priority is given to permanent workers. Services and benefits provided by the employer can also stop. For example, provision of transport for children to get to school, with repercussions on education. Where workers lose their jobs, people are not only losing their homes but also the little bit of cultivation they might have around their homes. In general, low levels of education of agricultural workers, especially casual workers, means it can be difficult to secure work outside farms. Elderly people have been particularly hard hit by a loss of benefits and the absence of social safety nets to cushion them from impacts.

South Africa – Land reform with good intentions, but…

- Existing good policies and legal framework has not been sufficient to achieve successful land reform
- Land reform articulated in: restitution, tenure security, land redistribution
- Existence of targeted supportive mechanisms for workers
- But limited knowledge, understanding of and participation in the schemes by workers
- Insufficient advocacy and environment that did not allow real and full participation of workers jeopardised the success of the scheme.

South Africa’s land reform programme comprises three sub-programmes: restitution to those forcibly removed from lands in the past; tenure security for those already on farms; and land redistribution. The Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act (1994) is based on willing buyer-willing seller principles whereby land transactions are voluntary. The act assures stronger protection of the rights of farm workers over the land they occupy. The land redistribution programme is considered to be the one most beneficial to farm workers. It is grant supported, based on “proportional beneficiary contribution on a sliding scale”, and covers projects on food safety nets, production for market projects as well as share equity schemes and schemes in communal areas (Atkinson et al, 2004: 3).
However, studies suggest that farm worker knowledge of the programme itself is very limited. Options are limited or nonexistent, union engagement with land reform is sporadic and based on individual support actions across the country. Moreover, there appear to be barriers of mistrust between commercial agricultural associations and unions. Union organisers and workers frequently lack training and knowledge of policies and programmes to pursue more rigorously active roles in support of land reform programmes on behalf of workers. Add to this the tendency for Offices of the Department for Land Affairs to be difficult for farm workers to reach and the overwhelming absence of farm visits by officials to inform farm workers how the process works, and the reasons for farmers’ limited knowledge on how to go about acquiring land become clear (Atkinson et al., 2004: 34). “Need to accompany land reform with support in developing knowledge and skills to use their land effectively. Black people have not been involved in running own farms in South Africa for almost a century. Many of the people receiving land through the programme had limited experience of managing natural resources. The result is low levels of theoretical and practical understanding of agriculture, which is making it difficult for land reform beneficiaries to assess their farms’ potential and choose between different production options.” (Bradstock, 2005a).

6.2 Philippines – partial reforms, partial success

- Partial reform based on voluntary land transfer schemes
- Landless labourers recognised as beneficiaries of land reform
- Provision of complementary support services
- However, only 3% of workers received land, and the majority of beneficiaries are below the poverty line
- Good intentions and legal systems in place did not guarantee the success of the land reform policy
- Was it a problem of lack of political will? Or oppositions by landowners?

Land reform in The Philippines can be subdivided into two phases: Presidential Decree 27 from 1972 to 1988 and Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP) from 1988 onwards. The Philippines’ situation can be thought of as partial reform (Putzel, 2000). It was based on voluntary land transfer schemes, a variant on market-led agrarian reform.

The intention was for CARP to include all private and public agricultural lands, no matter the commodity produced there or the tenurial status of the grower/labourer. The programme also recognised all landless labourers working on the land, as well as farmers, as beneficiaries of the agrarian reform programme. The programme also made provision for delivering support services such as rural development projects, human resource development and infrastructure. Options for tenure security for farmers and farm workers include leasehold arrangements, stock distribution options, and production and profit sharing schemes. Beneficiaries would also be able to access legal assistance in resolving
agrarian disputes. Agrarian Reform Communities were established to direct these support services to beneficiaries (Reyes, 2002).

By the end of the 1990s, when CARP came to an end, how much land had been distributed? Data from the 1998 Annual Poverty Indicator Survey, a nationally representative survey, indicate that 68 per cent of households with at least one member working in agriculture do not have access to land other than their residence, and only about 3 per cent received land through CARP (Deininger et al 1999).

6.3 Summary of case studies

A comparative analysis of the experience in land reform exemplified above shows that in all cases land reform has not been a panacea to the problems faced by rural workers, due to the lack of many other supportive mechanisms, or the lack of political will to implement the programme. A good policy framework is a necessary but not sufficient condition to change the livelihoods of rural labour. For example, in South Africa, lack or insufficient literacy, education and skills were main constraints that workers faced and that impeded them to benefit from land reform.

It is clear from the examples outlined above that redistributive land reform has taken different forms and met with varying success in terms of coverage and impact on productivity, income and poverty reduction. The worst case scenario in terms of negative impacts of land reform for agricultural workers is represented by Zimbabwe. This highlighted that workers may potentially lose their: homes; permanent income and secondary casual/ seasonal income from agricultural work; access to inputs for own crop production (with food security impact and income loss); access to other income earning opportunities; credit facilities and subsidised foodstuffs; access to education and health services (Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe, 2001). Actual experiences of land reform demonstrate that these outcomes are not only the exception, but can potentially occur as by-product of the reform itself.

7. Policy Implications

Our review highlights that there has been a “history of neglect” of appropriate support to agricultural workers during land reform processes, with many farm workers losing out, place this group of vulnerable workers in ever more precarious positions. This is exacerbated by the globalisation of agriculture, which has tended to be accompanied by increasingly casualised positions for agricultural workers/labour, erosion of rights and growing invisibility as third-party contracting and/or working for small-scale family farms means many of these workers do not appear in national labour statistics.

From the review of the theoretically and empirical literature clear messages emerge to suggest that land reform processes can be labour-friendly and pro-poor though supporting the rights and specific needs of the intended beneficiaries – landless agricultural workers/
labour. In particular, attention should be paid to the following areas and dimensions of land reform as these are likely to deeply affect the outcome of the reform process:

**An enabling policy environment and legal framework**

- *Strengthening the rights of agricultural labour*, especially those of poor and vulnerable groups, including casual workers, social protection and safety nets.

- *Protection of rights of marginalised workers* so that codes can deliver substantive changes in working conditions and to protect workers against eviction and substandard farm worker housing on commercial farms.

- *Improve marginalised workers’ access to legal institutions*, processes and legal assistance.

- *Ensure Core ILO standards apply to all workers, are embodied in law as well as protected and realised in practice*, including freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, no discrimination in employment, abolition of forced labour, elimination of child labour as embodied in ILO conventions 87 and 98.

**Active advocacy for workers’ interests and needs**


- *Strengthen unions’ capacity to represent and champion effectively agricultural workers’ interests*, acknowledging that unions potentially have a key role to play in organising and representing agricultural workers and ensuring their rights are upheld during land reform processes.

- *Support to Unions and other rural institutions in tailoring the services they provide to the specific problems agricultural workers face*, including: insecurity of land tenure; limited access to credit; and limited scope for self-organisation.

- *Provide training and knowledge of policies and programmes to Union organisers and workers* to enable them to pursue more rigorously active roles in support of land reform programmes on behalf of workers, and to address discrepancies between what is agreed in principle and what is put into policy practice.

- *Improve access to the relevant institutions and provide support to poor people in pursuing land claims*. Ensure land reform processes are not institutionally/administratively overly-burdensome, acting as further constraint to ag workers/labourers to become beneficiaries.
Resource mobilisation and targeted interventions

- **Provision of agrarian and social support services**, essential for food security, poverty reduction and rural development, such as transport to school and health services, are often provided by employers and cease with change of ownership.

- **Support to agricultural worker land beneficiaries to develop experience and/or skills in farm management** to enable them to plan and develop their farms, to assess their farms’ potential and choose between different production options. This could include capacity building in management skills.

- **Help to secure work outside farms** for those agricultural workers who lose their jobs and do not benefit from land redistribution during land reform processes.

- **Encourage unions to embrace non-permanent labourers** and to explore innovative ways to extent their membership base to casual/informal/migrant workers and to take up a more active role for the development of rural communities.

- **Improve access to the necessary capital and/or credit to purchase land at market and above-market prices.**

8. Conclusions

Most of the evidence of land reform reviewed in this paper cannot be judged as successful in terms of the landless-poor rural labourers. Land reform started to feature prominently in the development agenda in the 1950s in Latin America. Today, 40 years later, land distribution in developing countries is still highly skewed and the interest / demand for redistributive policies has been revived. However, today the process is clearly evolving and alternative ways to achieve land redistribution and a promote change in the rural sector are being explored.

The key message of this paper is that in order to obtain successful and sustainable land reform we need to start with a clear understanding and categorisation of those who need the land and will care it, as these workers and farmers do not constitute an homogeneous group. However, even when an analysis of those who need the land is carried out, marginalised groups like farm workers always tend to lose out because they are invisible (they have no voice, they are not unionised, they work for powerful elites). The continued invisibility of categories like farm workers has very high social and economic costs and it is not conducive to social and economic development. Even in those countries where land reform was implemented in a successful way, the changing demographic, social, economic and environmental conditions call for continued review and assessment of land reform processes to ensure that these are revised and evolving according to the evolving social and political environment.
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