

Land: NGO intervention at CSD 17 - IPM on Feb. 25th 2009

The lack of adequate and secure access to land and natural resources by the rural and urban poor is one of the key causes of hunger and poverty in the world. This was highlighted by Sudan on behalf of G77 and China. She said that “land tenure security and equitable access to land are key for sustainable development and poverty reduction.” The Czech Republic on behalf of EU further highlighted the FAO Guidelines on the right to food as an important tool in this regard.

The highly unequal distribution of land ownership in many countries remains an issue of concern in a number of regions around the world. In rural areas, the trend towards reconcentration of land ownership and the reversal of redistributive agrarian reform processes can be observed in countries with traditionally more egalitarian patterns of access to land.

Tenure insecurity is one of the most urgent issues to be tackled in order to immediately secure the livelihoods of the rural and urban populations. Land grabbing, violent dispossession and displacement from armed conflicts, extractive industries, tourism, industrial and infrastructure projects, accelerated urbanisation, and last, but not least, the promotion of agrofuels, represent a severe threat to rural communities. At the same time, private investors have discovered foreign farmland as a new source of profit. In the course of the current financial crisis, small farmers with debts are threaten by loosing their land due to foreclosure.

Land and natural resources are vital for the realization of the full range of human rights of the most marginalized groups like women, indigenous peoples, peasants, landless rural workers, fisherfolks, pastoralists and ethnic groups. Therefore, using a human rights framework in developing land policies is key particularly for addressing the unequal relationships of power which are behind unjust and unsustainable land tenure structures.

Priorities for action:

- There is a need for agrarian reforms which ensure secure tenure and an equitable access to land and natural resources. A territorial approach to land policies which integrates the worldviews of different rural constituencies is needed. We recall the important work of ICARRD, the conference on agrarian reform and rural development that took place in 2006.
- Given the fact that women’s ownership is as low as 2% in some countries, recognition of the rights of women over land, ensuring their access to and jurisdiction over land and natural resources, and guaranteeing their representation in decision-making is vital.
- Recognition of the socio-environmental functions of land, water and natural resources.
- Transparent and inclusive processes in the development of land policies that are people-centered, recognize diverse tenure systems, and involve innovative and accessible systems of recognition of land rights of both men and women. Sustainable land management, conservation and agro-ecological strategies centered on peasant and family agriculture.
- Trade policies that favour livestock-based livelihoods and peasant and indigenous production for local, regional and national markets.