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“LAND, CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT: WHAT ROLE FOR DONORS?”

Informal experts’ seminar

**jointly organised by the OECD Development Centre, the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate
and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**

Paris, 19-20 June 2003

SUMMARY

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1. On 19-20 June 2003, the OECD Development Centre, the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) organised an informal experts' seminar 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 further advance this agenda. The meeting lasted one and a half days. In order to help focus discussions, an issues paper was commissioned by USAID and the OECD Development Centre. This paper, drafted by Nicolas Pons-Vignon and Jean-Louis Arcand, was used as a starting point by participants, who did not submit formal presentations.

2. During the first day, experts from academic and international institutions explored the links between land and conflict in developing countries. Findings from research and projects carried out in very different settings, and from contrasting perspectives, were shared in very fruitful discussions, revolved around three topics: access to land, security of tenure and distribution of land.

3. Several points were widely agreed upon, including: i) Commonly identified land-related "roots" of conflict tend to result in violence only when groups are politicised. This politicisation, which can be on a variety of lines – generational, ethnic groups, nationality, etc. – tends to occur under specific conditions, characterised by lack of opportunities; ii) Land, because it is a crucial asset in many poor societies, can be a central object of conflict, hence complicating the task of rebuilding peace once fighting has ceased; iii) Security of tenure, ensured by well-functioning institutions, though a key element of sustained peace is not a guarantor of it so long as political issues remain unresolved (as shown by problems experienced by indigenous communities living in developed countries); iv) In countries emerging from violent conflict, land policy can play a critical role in ensuring that long-lasting grievances are not sharpened, especially in the short term. This is often overlooked, as in Afghanistan for example.

4. By contrast, diverging views were expressed regarding the potential that equitable institutions *per se* have to mitigate conflict, and the role of land reform in reducing the scope for conflict. All recognised the conflict-prone history of land reforms, but some stressed its importance as a way of satisfying demands and ensuring peace through distribution and growth, while others questioned its systematic use and suggested that alternative policies of asset redistribution aimed at creating opportunities be explored (*e.g.*, rural and urban job creation).

5. The second day was devoted to drawing conclusions from the first day's exchanges and reviewing the lessons learned from donors' experiences with a view to identifying effective approaches and fruitful areas for future research. First, current understanding of the link between land and conflict is insufficient. This is mainly due to inappropriate research methodologies. Several participants stressed the need to carry out comparative studies of a limited number of contrasted cases (*e.g.*, Guatemala and El Salvador), in order to highlight the mechanisms which correlate land and conflict. Second, co-ordination and consistency of donor policies pertaining to land and conflict is essential in order to avoid possibly tragic counter effects. Third, land policies, if they are to be conducive to peace, should be broad-based and hence become more participatory. Policy design is an essential element; this raises complex issues of legitimacy and efficiency and brings to the fore the importance, stressed throughout the two days, of understanding the political background in the country and the implications of donor policies.

6. The participants intend to continue examining the ways in which donor policies with regard to land issues can become more conducive to peace. Mark Berman, Acting Chair of the DAC Conflict Peace and Development Co-operation Network, proposed to convey the results of the seminar to the next CPDC meeting, scheduled to take place in November 2003. The Development Centre will supervise the integration of the participants' comments and the preliminary policy conclusions into the issues paper, which will be published within the framework of a broader study of the links between land and conflict.