Pro-Poor Land Reform
Borras, Saturnino

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C.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has demonstrated that to be truly redistributive, a land reform must effect on a pre-existing agrarian structure a change in ownership of and/or control over land resources, wherein such a change flows strictly from the landed to the landless and land-poor classes or from rich landlords to poor peasants and rural workers. Here “ownership and/or control over land resources” means the effective control over the nature, pace, extent, and direction of surplus production and distribution. Moreover, pre-existing socioeconomic structures and socio-political institutions influence the struggles for and outcomes of redistributive land reform by the extent to which they shape and condition prior distribution of land-based wealth and political power among different contending social classes and groups in a given state and society. They do not, however, pre-determine outcomes. Structural and institutional settings are important contexts and objects of state–society political contestations that, in turn, shape and reshape the degree and forms of pro- and anti-reform interactions. These political processes dynamically alter the pre-existing limits to and opportunities for redistributive land reform, facilitating or obstructing the land redistribution process. The political actions and strategies of pro-reform state and societal actors can influence land reform policy processes and outcomes by defeating anti-reform resistance and surmounting obstacles erected by structural and institutional factors, usually resulting in highly varied and uneven outcomes both spatially and temporally.

This chapter elaborates on the conclusions of this study, which revolve around three themes: the meaning of redistributive land reform (section C.2),
structural and institutional influences on the limits to and opportunities for redistributive land reform (section C.3), and the role of the political actions and strategies of various state and societal actors (section C.4). The final section further explores the possible implications of this study for land reform theories, policies, politics, and research methods in the Philippines and elsewhere.

C.2 RETHINKING REDISTRIBUTIVE LAND REFORM

The conventional definition of land reform is founded on the concept of the formal, statist private-public land property rights dichotomy. This has influenced the subsequent literature’s bias on the transfer of (private) ownership rights, the defining feature of which is the redistribution of the right to alienate. This fixation on the redistribution of formal proprietary ownership has led to only partially correct explanations of land reform processes and outcomes. These explanations cannot fully account for the types of outcomes shown in the tales of the five agrarian cases recounted at the beginning of the introduction.

This study has shown that the problem with conventional wisdom on land reform manifests in three ways: (i) in the a priori exclusion of redistribution accomplishment in public lands, (ii) in the a priori inclusion of all officially reported “redistribution” in private lands, and (iii) in the inconsistent exclusion-inclusion of share tenancy/leasehold reform in considering what is and what is not redistributive land reform.

On the a priori exclusion of redistribution in public lands
Contrary to the popular assumption in the literature that land reform in public lands does not constitute redistributive reform, a number of empirical cases studied here showed that redistributive reform can be, and has been, achieved in public lands. The case of the (multinational corporation) Dole-controlled pineapple plantation (DARBICI, chapter 3) shows that redistributive land reform had been achieved when the plantation was redistributed to farm workers in 1989, although the subsequent post-land transfer “leaseback arrangement,” whose terms are so onerous, effectively cancelled out the earlier redistributive gains made by farm workers. Meanwhile, the case of the Aquino estate (chapter 4) demonstrates that redistributive reform can, and did, occur in the public forestland category (under the CBFM program) of the Philippine land reform law (CARP). The formal rights and the effective control of the landlord over the (public) lands were transferred to the peasants. Hundreds
of thousands, perhaps a few million hectares of this type of lands (which in official documents are classified as forestlands without tenants, when in fact they are croplands tilled by tenants and are controlled by landlords) are host to a great number of poor peasants in the Philippines today.

Clarification of the notion of redistributive land reform in the context of public lands can facilitate a better understanding of successful land reform experiences, as in the cases of South Korea and Taiwan, where public lands were in fact an important component of land reform, and of less successful past attempts at land reform, such as in Colombia in the 1960s, where elite-controlled public lands escaped the analytic lens of many land reform scholars. The reconceptualization put forward in this regard will also facilitate better understanding of the challenges facing redistributive land reform and land policies in many developing countries today, such as in Thailand, Indonesia, and Bolivia, as well as in African countries where significant quantities of public lands have ended up under the control of private elites.

**On the *a priori* inclusion of all officially reported “redistribution” in private lands**

While the conventional land reform literature has been quite “strict” about its definition of redistributive land reform to exclude redistribution in public lands (and share tenancy/leasehold reform), it has been conceptually unsystematic with regard to its attitude toward private lands. Conventional land reform literature has been biased towards private property, and while many studies have raised criticisms with regard to acceptance of all official data about land redistribution, most of these studies have been framed to include *a priori* all officially reported “redistribution” in private lands. The current study has demonstrated that this perspective has partly allowed the entry of the notion of “market-based land reform” into the redistributive land reform theoretical, policy, and political debate, leading to confusing and even muddled terms and direction of the debate.

This study has shown that some of the officially reported and popularly accepted land redistribution accomplishments in private lands are in fact devoid of the essential elements of redistributive reform. In this study, outcomes are considered non-redistributive when there is no transfer of power from the landed elite to landless and land-poor peasants to effectively control the nature, pace, extent, and direction of surplus production and extraction and the disposition of such surplus from the land — even when official records claim otherwise. Real change in who holds power over the
land does occur on occasion when it does not constitute redistributive reform, because the direction of change is within and among elites (landed or not), or from the landless and land-poor peasants to the landed elite. Taking off from this assumption, this study has shown that the Philippine CARP’s non-redistributive outcomes have been significant and have also occurred in the private land category.

The non-redistributive CARP outcomes can be seen in the different variants of the voluntary land transfer (VLT) scheme (chapter 3). These VLT cases were usually faked redistribution via “paper sales” and/or the use of “on-paper beneficiaries” who are either family members, poor and non-poor peasant dummies, coerced tenants and farm workers, or people completely unaware of the transaction. Many landlords use VLT to perpetuate their control over land resources, although they make it appear as though they have complied with the spirit of land redistribution. This explains, for example, why banana landlord Antonio Floirendo is selling his land at a price sixteen times lower than what the local courts say is the “just price” for his land, and why Danding Cojuangco and the banana company Marsman are “giving” away their lands “for free.” These schemes are non-redistributive because they do not involve essential transfer of wealth and power to the landless and land-poor peasants and farm workers. The terms of land use in post-land transfer contracts in these cases ensure the perpetual control of these landlords over the plantations.

Meanwhile, the minuscule MLAR pilot test in the country shows how local elites almost always manipulate market friendly and decentralized processes in land transactions to their sole benefit. A combination of corruption, anti-poor outcomes, and a general anti-reform impact has characterized MLAR in the Philippines (chapter 3). The stock distribution option (SDO) has been another scheme devoid of any dimension of redistributive reform. Under CARP, corporate farms are spared from expropriation if they opt to redistribute corporate stocks equivalent to the value of the land asset of the corporation. Theoretically, this scheme is non-redistributive when there is no essential pro-poor transfer of significant wealth and power within the corporate farm. And as predicted, corporations depressed the value of their land, jacked up the value of the non-land assets of the company, and manipulated financial accounting to show perennially low income, and therefore low dividends, resulting in the beneficiaries ending up with a negligible share of in the company’s assets and power. This was the case, for example, in Hacienda Luisita, the sugar cane plantation owned by the family of former president Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino.
Overpriced land transfers via the voluntary offer-to-sell (VOS) scheme are another variant of apparent-but-not-real CARP land redistribution outcomes. In this study, especially as explained in Chapter 1, land is considered to have multiple dimensions, that is, political, economic, social, and cultural. Thus, its value cannot be reduced to solely monetary terms, and so the notion of “overpricing” in the context of land reform is in itself a contested concept. Yet, in the context of land reform policies, it still is possible to detect some practices of straightforward monetary overpricing. Here, an overpriced land transfer transaction occurs when the discrepancy between what is a generally acceptable price level (the one pegged by the LBP) is overruled in favour of a much higher land value based on the decision of a regular court or the DARAB. The case of the “Garchitorena land scam” in Bicol is a good example of overpricing through VOS resulting in the non-redistributive nature of the transaction.

In some cases, beneficiaries are unable to take actual possession of formally awarded lands due to strong, violent opposition from a landlord, who oftentimes has a pending legal appeal about the process. It is indeed non-redistributive when the peasants who the official records claim are the beneficiaries of land reform have in fact failed to take effective control of the awarded lands due to ongoing landlord opposition. Thus, this is another case of official records claiming achievement in redistributive land reform, while in reality there was none — or at the very least none yet. This is illustrated, for example, in the Benedicto estate in Negros Occidental (chapter 3) and on the Mitra farm in Bicol (chapter 4). In addition, one of the most commonly cited cases of unrealized reform, showing a discrepancy between official records and reality, is the problem of deliberate, fraudulent padding of accomplishment reports. This study showed a few examples of such fraud (chapter 3), as in the case of redistribution reports about government-owned lands during the Braganza DAR (2001–2002). Finally, the sale of fictitious land titles to government via VOS is another fraud: a straightforward non-redistributive CARP outcome that has made it to the official land redistribution accomplishment report. This phenomenon has occurred to a significant extent in the ARMM.

Clarification of the notion of redistributive land reform has provided this study with an analytic tool to examine and segregate land reform outcomes in private lands that are devoid of any elements of redistributive reform. This reconceptualization can contribute toward a better understanding of the land reform experiences in many other countries in the past where non-redistributive outcomes might have occurred even in private lands, such as
some of the possibly overpriced land sales during the Frei administration in Chile in the mid-1960s. This conceptual clarification can also contribute toward a better understanding of the current debate on land reform where the market-led agrarian reform policy model has been aggressively promoted by the World Bank in several countries, including Brazil, Colombia, and South Africa.

On the *a priori* and inconsistent inclusion, or exclusion, of share tenancy/leasehold reform

The conventional land reform literature rejects redistribution accomplishment in public lands, and it is inconsistent in including or excluding those reforms achieved or attempted through share tenancy/leasehold reform. This study argues for another approach by using the reconceptualized notion of redistributive reform explained earlier. In fact, this study shows that redistribution of wealth and power can, and in many cases did, occur through leasehold reform. This is demonstrated in the case of the Zoleta property (chapter 4), where the tenants’ share of the regular harvest doubled after conversion to leasehold arrangements (and the landlord’s share was reduced by half) and their long-term tenure security ensured.

This study’s conceptual reconsideration of the particular case of share tenancy in the context of redistributive reform can contribute toward a fuller understanding of the political economy of tenancy relations (and reforms) that have persisted in many parts of the world since ancient times. It is also useful for placing in a proper context within the debate on redistributive land reform the experiences of Taiwan and of *Operation Barga* in West Bengal (India) on the one hand and the less than desirable outcomes of leasehold reform in post-Apartheid South Africa on the other hand.

Thus, as shown in the discussion above, the conventional land reform literature has generally failed to account for the two broad types of land redistribution outcomes: that is, (Herring’s, 1983) “real” and “apparent-but-not-real” outcomes. In fact, this study has shown that redistributive reform can occur in both private and public lands, through redistribution of full formal property rights, including the right to alienate and via leasehold reforms, and through a variety of formal land redistribution and tenure reform policy instruments. By problematizing the concept of redistributive land reform where the issue of power relations between different actors competing for effective control over land resources is the central issue, the weaknesses of conventional thinking are brought under a brighter analytic spotlight, and redistributive land reform is defined more precisely.
This study also concludes that while it is extremely difficult to ascertain the exact extent of redistributive reform in light of our findings in this study, it is possible to get a general sense of it. The extent of CARP’s redistributive land reform outcome is far below the official claims in government statistics, but it also surpasses the pessimistic predictions and current claims of CARP critics (see chapter 2). The existence of actual redistributive reform side by side with apparent-but-not-real outcomes has rendered it extremely difficult to render a statistically exact account of land redistribution output.

Overall, the reconceptualization of the notion of redistributive reform provides a useful analytic tool for examining the tales of the five agrarian cases outlined at the start of the introduction and for putting the recent proposition of the market-led agrarian reform (MLAR) policy model in its proper perspective (i.e., in understanding that MLAR does not constitute and promote redistributive land reform). Our conceptual reconsideration is also useful in the discussion of the next set of theoretical themes: the limits-centred and opportunities-centred views in the study of land reform.

C.3 STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES ON THE LIMITS TO AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDISTRIBUTIVE LAND REFORM

The nature and extent of land reform outcomes are, to varying degrees, influenced by pre-existing structural and institutional conditions, specifically by the ways the latter have shaped prior distribution of wealth and political power among different contending groups and classes in a given state and society. Historically, countries with an important agrarian sector usually have a state that is heavily influenced by the land-owning classes and their allies. Thus, the actual distribution of wealth (including land) and political power is heavily concentrated in the hands of the landed elite. The land reform literature has recognized this and offered systematic analyses of the interlinked issues of land monopoly and political power. However, this study also pointed out that while in many settings the pre-existing macroeconomic structures and socio-political institutions are actually operative to the point of obstructing redistributive land reforms, there are also institutions that, while they do not automatically undermine the power of the landowning classes, can be mobilized to counter anti-reform manoeuvres. Thus, pre-existing structures and institutions do not pre-determine policy outcomes. The structural and institutional settings are important as the context and object of these political contestations that shape and reshape the degree and forms of the interactions.
The problems in the conventional land reform literature with regard to the actual role of structures and institutions are largely reflected in the persistence of two contending views, namely, the limits-centred and opportunities-centred perspectives.

On the one hand, the problem with the limits-centred approach is its overemphasis on the obstacles to redistributive land reforms to the extent that it overlooks the actual and potential opportunities. For example, the central state, an important actor in redistributive land reform, has been reconfigured during the neoliberal era amidst a simultaneous triple squeeze: “from above” through globalization, “from below” through (partial) decentralization, and “from the sides” through privatization of some of its regulatory powers (chapters 2–5). But this era also witnessed the emergence of new types of autonomous, polycentric (rural) social movements (chapter 5) that can potentially and actually contribute to keeping and/or reviving land reform on the policy agendas where it is absent — or kept dormant, such as in the case of Indonesia from the 1960s to the 1990s — and push for its fuller implementation where it actually exists, such as in Brazil in the 1990s.

On the other hand, the problem with the opportunities-centred perspective is its overemphasis on the favourable factors for land reform to the extent that it fails to understand the actual and potential limits to reforms. For example, while some landlords would go (and some have actually gone) bankrupt amidst agricultural trade reforms and so more farms would be expected to enter the land market, redistributive land reform is not automatically — or easily — implemented on these estates. The case of sugar cane plantations and cattle ranches in the Philippines (chapter 2) and the experience of Brazil show that despite the sharp fall in land prices due to agricultural trade reforms in the 1990s, landlords have remained vehemently opposed to land reform.

More fundamentally, the lack of systematic conceptual understanding in both camps about redistributive land reform has resulted in the conflation of and confusion over basic concepts in land reform scholarship, which in turn has resulted in even more confusion in the discussion about the limits to and possibilities for redistributive land reform. One camp may be discussing limits to a redistributive land reform, the other camp may be discussing opportunities for a non-redistributive “land reform,” and so on. By problematizing the concept of redistributive reform, and locating the discussion about the limits to and opportunities for land reform within this core concept, the terms of the debate on contemporary land reform can be better clarified, as has been attempted in this study (chapters 2–5). The two dominant perspectives have
certainly raised important and relevant issues, which must not be dismissed altogether. Building on these issues, however, this study has attempted a more balanced but critical view, acknowledging the necessity to look into the roles played by state and societal actors.

C.4 THE PRO-REFORM STATE–SOCIETY INTERACTION FOR REDISTRIBUTIVE LAND REFORM

In the context of determining the role of state and societal actors in redistributive land reform, the conventional literature is broadly divided into two dominant camps: the state-centred and the society-centred perspective. Both have explanatory power, but both have weaknesses as well. The state-centred approach puts too much emphasis on the role of state actors in carrying out redistributive land reform and thus overlooks the influence of social structures and institutions. Meanwhile, the society-centred approach puts too much weight on the role of social structures and institutions in redistributive land reform and thus overlooks the significance of the autonomous initiatives by pro-reform state actors. This study employed Jonathan Fox’s “interactive approach” to the study of state–society relations to build on the strengths of the two dominant perspectives, while trying to fill the remaining gaps. This approach posits that a symbiotic interaction between autonomous social movements “from below” and initiatives by state reformists “from above” constitutes the most promising strategy for carrying out redistributive land reform. Using the interactive approach, this study found that the political actions and strategies of pro-reform state and societal actors have, to a significant extent, determined the nature, pace, extent, and direction of land redistribution processes and outcomes by defeating the anti-reform opposition and overcoming the constraints and surmounting the obstacles posed by pre-existing structural and institutional factors.

Many land reform studies emphasize the role of local peasant organizations and movements in achieving redistributive land reform. However, while highly autonomous and capable local peasant organizations are a necessary ingredient for achieving a greater degree of successful land redistribution, they are not sufficient because landlords evade reform by working in arenas far beyond (and beyond the reach of) the local community. Most of the local agrarian reform cases discussed in chapter 3 show that despite mobilization of local peasant groups for land reform, successful redistribution was far from being realized because anti-reform adversaries mounted their opposition to reform at levels beyond the reach of local peasant associations.
Moreover, the pre-existing distribution of political power is uneven in favour of the landowning classes and their allies. But, as said earlier, there are socio-political institutions that, while they do not automatically undermine anti-reform power, can be mobilized to counter anti-reform forces. Thus, societal allies are crucial in terms of augmenting the power of peasant organizations and extending the reach of their collective actions beyond their locality. Traditionally, peasants’ allies for redistributive reform have been progressive (electoral) political parties (more commonly communist and socialist parties), progressive elements in churches and their organizations, and other middle-class intellectuals. In the Philippines, electoral political parties have not played a crucial role in the struggle for land, mainly because programmatic party politics have largely failed to take root in the country’s predominantly personality-oriented electoral politics. However, other political parties and movements have played important roles in the struggle for land and power, for instance, communist parties and other leftist social movements, as well as progressive elements in churches and their associations. But the most significant ally of the landless and land-poor peasants that has emerged since the 1980s has been the progressive rural-oriented NGOs that consider themselves part of broader rural social movements.

These societal allies (political parties, social movements, churches, and NGOs) have at various times played an important role in maintaining the issue of land reform on the national policy agenda: during the 1986–1988 policymaking process for CARP (chapter 2) and in the continuing revisions of the CARP law; in the lobby in the mid-1990s against further exclusions of land redistribution coverage; during the 1997–1998 campaign for the ten-year extension of the CARP law; and in the lobby against the exclusion of retrenched farm workers from land reform on commercial plantations (chapters 3 and 4). These societal allies have also provided material and non-material resources to local peasant groups, for example, in the form of transportation support for mass mobilizations in key urban centres, legal assistance, and facilitated media coverage, as exemplified in the struggle of the banana farm workers in the case of DAPCO (chapter 4). As shown in chapters 2–4, most of the local struggles for land would have remained localized and could have easily been defeated by landlords had it not been for the societal allies who assisted in elevating the level of struggle beyond the village or municipal boundaries. These allies also facilitated both horizontal and vertical integration among local peasant associations, which would otherwise have remained scattered. This was the case, for example, in the PEACE Foundation’s assistance in the formation of KMP in the mid-1980s, in the formation of DKMP in the early 1990s, and in the founding of UNORKA in the late 1990s (chapter 5).
The ability of local peasant groups to link with and mobilize societal allies can bring them closer to their goals. However, even when they are strong, pro-reform societal coalitions are far from achieving their goal because landlords usually evade reform in alliance with state actors. Hence, further alliances with reformists within the state is crucial to further increase the power of pro-reform forces, especially because state reformists, by themselves, even when capable of launching autonomous reformist initiatives, cannot easily defeat the state-societal anti-reform alliance. The uneven emergence of pro-reform state actors can be understood from the perspective of the state being “comprised of a range of actors” that must maintain a minimum level of political legitimacy while pursuing the process of capital accumulation for both private and state interests at all times.

The conflict-ridden political processes that led to either the real or apparent-but-not-real land redistribution outcomes examined in this study show the crucial influence of the pro-reform state-society alliance. The unexpected positive outcomes in land redistribution during the Garilao DAR (1992–1998) and to some extent during the Morales DAR (1998–2000) can only be attributed to the nature and scale of the pro-reform state-society alliance. From the perspective of specific agrarian cases, this study has shown that the pro-reform state-society alliance played the most crucial role in securing victories for redistributive land reform. These victories occurred in both private lands and public lands, as well as through leasehold reform, as discussed earlier. The state-society reformist alliance has been necessary in agrarian cases that went through expropriation (compulsory acquisition and operation land transfer), as demonstrated in the cases of the De los Reyes estate, Hacienda Roxas, the Salomon estate, DAPCO, the Mitra farm, and the Candaba-San Luis ricelands (chapter 4). This alliance was also crucial to the successful resolution of agrarian cases through various land transfer modalities that are traditionally (but erroneously) believed to be “non-conflictive,” such as VOS, as in the case of Superior Agro and the Benedicto estate, lands controlled by government financial institutions such as the CIIF estate, and public lands such as the Aquino farm and DARBCI (chapter 4).

However, pro-reform state-society alliances do not guarantee automatic and easy achievement of their goals in land reform because they have to surmount the obstacles erected by the anti-reform state-society coalition. This study has shown that despite the joint and/or parallel actions by the pro-reform state and societal actors and coalition, some major defeats in the cause of redistributive land reform occurred both in specific cases and at the policy level. The case of the Langkaan estate in Cavite that led to the resignation of
reformist DAR secretary Florencio Abad in 1990 is an example. The gaining ground of non-redistributive VLT in several cases, such as the Danding Cojuangco orchard and the banana plantations of Floirendo and Marsman (chapter 3), attests to the fact that the pro-reform state–society alliance is not invincible.

The anti-reform forces can be defeated when their ranks are divided horizontally (e.g., with cleavages between different local elite groups) and vertically (e.g., with the losses of allies “at the top” or within the state), while the ranks of pro-reform forces remain solid, united, and persistent. The cases of the banana farm workers in DAPCO, the Salomon estate, the Candaba-San Luis ricelands, and Superior Agro (chapter 4) exemplify this. In addition, the pro-reform state–society alliance can facilitate redistributive reform outcomes in the contested boundaries of inclusion in the land reform policy of some landholdings and peasants and the exclusion of others. The “inclusion-exclusion” issues in CARP coverage are not absolute, automatic, and permanent as claimed in official records, as proclaimed by laws, or as assumed by analysts. There are farm types marked for exemption, and thus assumed to be automatically excluded from land reform, that have been expropriated, either partially or fully. This is demonstrated in the cases of Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija (a military reservation), the University of the Philippines Land Grant in Basilan (an educational landholding), and the Aquafil estate in Mindoro Occidental (a fishpond), as discussed in chapter 4. Though critics have simply assumed that such exclusion is automatic, the cases studied here demonstrate that it is not. But again, the political processes examined here have shown that sustained political mobilizations by pro-reform state and societal actors were responsible for the expropriation of these estates. However, not all collective actions resulted in successful expropriation, as we see in the pending case of the Davao Penal Colony. In addition, this study looked into the contentious issue of beneficiary “inclusion-exclusion.” The poorer, more vulnerable strata of the peasantry, on many occasions predominantly women, were usually de-prioritized with regard to — or even completely excluded from — land reform. However, through sustained collective action within the pro-reform state and societal alliance, some peasants who were inherently disadvantaged in the land reform process have successfully resisted exclusionary currents. This was the case, for example, of farm workers who struggled against the exclusionary DAR administrative order no. 6 series of 1998 (chapter 4).

Moreover, the nature and extent of state–society interactions largely determine the nature, pace, extent, and direction of redistributive land reform, nationally and sub-nationally, over time. These interactions put into
operational mode the limits and opportunities facilitated or imposed by pre-existing structural and institutional conditions in a given society. The highly uneven nature and spread of these pro-reform state–society alliances have resulted in varied and uneven outcomes of land reform policy, spatially and temporally.

In short, through the pro-reform state–society alliance, successful implementation of redistributive land reform has become possible but not automatic, difficult but not impossible. The lesson from the Philippines with regard to the role of political actions and strategies of societal and state actors is also useful for understanding past experiences in land reform policies and politics. While contending explanations of land reform processes have gravitated around either the state-centred perspective or society-centred explanations, the preliminary review of these experiences hints at the likelihood that the symbiotic interactions between pro-reform state and societal actors have accounted for the push toward redistributive land reforms, such as in Kerala (India), in Mexico during the administration of Lazaro Cardenas in the 1930s, in Chile during the Allende era, and even in China during the first wave of the communist land redistribution campaign. And like the lessons from these historical cases, this strategy has significant limitations as recently shown in the Philippine case as well: that it is dependent on two broad sets of state and societal actors — and usually, when reformism starts to wane within the state, the overall land reform initiative suffers important setbacks. The reconceptualization of state–society relations in the context of redistributive land reform is useful to obtain a fuller understanding of the limits to and opportunities for redistributive land reform in a contemporary context, especially amidst complex debates about the possible roles of societal actors and the state.

C.5 IMPLICATIONS: RECASTING SOME CONCEPTS, REVISING SOME PRACTICES

A number of possible implications of this study may be advanced. Theoretically, the argument put forward with regard to the more precise definition of redistributive land reform to mean redistribution of wealth and power entails a recasting of some conventional assumptions and conclusions about past and current land reform experiences. Whether popularly perceived as successful or otherwise, the nature and extent of these outcomes and their distribution across public and private lands may be reassessed in this new light. The definition of redistributive land reform offered in this study may at first appear too strict and
exclusionary. However, in a deeper sense, this reconceptualized definition is in fact more inclusionary because, unlike the traditional definition, it includes redistributive reforms not only in private lands but also in public lands, and it includes not only land transfers that involve the right to alienate but also leasehold reforms stewardship. Indeed, the conventional \textit{a priori} rejection of land reforms in public lands, \textit{a priori} acceptance of all officially reported land redistribution accomplishment in private lands, and \textit{a priori} inconsistent exclusion-inclusion of leasehold reforms must be cast away in any rigorous theorizing on redistributive land reform.

A related implication is that the two broad types of land redistribution outcomes (i.e., real and apparent-but-not-real) explained in this study may alter traditional conclusions regarding many past land reform experiences. Meanwhile, the rejection of market-led agrarian reform on the basis that, theoretically and in reality, it does not constitute and will not promote redistributive land reform must be relentlessly pursued.

The debate surrounding the limits to and opportunities for redistributive land reform, as well as the political strategies necessary to attain redistributive land reform, must also be re-examined from the basic starting point of what does and what does not constitute redistributive reform. Dichotomous views must be set aside in favour of a more balanced, critical, and dynamic assessment that does not assume that structures and institutions predetermine policy outcomes. The dichotomous state- and society-centred perspectives on redistributive land reform must also be revised in favour of a more interactive approach to state–society relations that is founded on the symbiotic interactions between social movements “from below” and initiatives by state reformists “from above” — but at the same time remains aware of the limits of such a strategy in the real world, as demonstrated in the Philippine case.

Finally, an implication of this study in theorizing about redistributive land reform is that a move toward a multidisciplinary development studies perspective is warranted. The land reform literature can be greatly enriched by other disciplines, specifically those specialized in community-based natural resource management, environmental studies, forest studies, and law and development. A more systematic integration of studies on state–society relations and social movements into the land reform scholarship has become an imperative.

In terms of research methodology, the reconceptualized notion of redistributive land reform requires that research methods be revised accordingly. Future studies require the critical use of official state statistics, but also non-official data and information gathered within and outside the
The Challenge of Redistributive Land Reform

state apparatus. Studies further require critical use of data aggregated at the national level and below. This study showed that nationally aggregated data can impart important information, and so it must always be used. However, below the national level, data and information are fantastically varied and so offer opportunities for richer analysis and interpretation. Below the national level are multiple levels, from regional to provincial, municipal, village, and farm. Thus, sub-national and cross-country sub-national comparative research methods can extend the explanatory reach of an inquiry. The varied and diverse outcomes within and between these levels and the processes that occur within and between them involving different, often competing, state and societal actors can more fully explain policy outcomes and processes.

In terms of policy, some implications of this study are noteworthy: For one, there is a need to develop better instruments to actually measure the degree of redistributive land reform, given that formal quantitative statistics offer an important but insufficient means of assessment. The task of actually measuring outcomes in redistributive reform policies based on the framework put forward in this study may bring the issue closer to other concepts such as democratization and empowerment, which are themselves difficult to measure. Furthermore, this study implies that future policies on redistributive land reform will have to cast away the conventional bias against public lands and leasehold reform. In fact, this study suggests that there is a necessary and urgent policy task: to re-examine and possibly reformulate existing land reform policies to address concerns related to these types of lands and reforms in a more integrated manner. Moreover, based on the findings of this study, it is imperative to move policy analyses away from the “official policy scope-centred” approach in order to address the urgent concerns that are usually left outside the parameters of the official scope of policy. Specifically, policy analyses and policy formulation in the future must systematically deal with the landholdings and peasant households that have been formally excluded from the official policy scope, for example, the “missing” CARP land distribution scope. Finally, based on the starting point of this study — that is, putting forward a sharper definition of redistributive land reform — these findings imply that the market-led agrarian reform policy model and its variants, such as CARP’s VLT, must be rejected as a policy option because they neither constitute nor promote redistributive reform.

The findings in this study also have political implications: It is important for rural social movement organizations, such as NGOs and peasant organizations, to maintain perspective on their strategic role and task in resolving the land question in their respective countries in favour of the landless and land-poor
peasants. It may thus be necessary for many of them to go beyond the narrow project-based view of the land reform struggle. It is also necessary for some NGOs and peasant organizations to review the notion of “conflict-free” state-society partnership currently being promoted by donor and governmental agencies. It is necessary for peasant movements and NGOs to seriously address the need for widespread militant but pragmatic forms of struggle for land and power. In addition, international development agencies, government and nongovernmental alike, may too need to rethink their general bias in favour of “conflict-free” development projects and reconsider embarking on renewed assistance to the political struggles for land redistribution in most developing countries.

Moreover, peasant organizations and NGOs may have to move away from “official policy scope-centred” political advocacy and mobilizations in order to broaden their agendas to include issues and concerns that the state usually refuses to include in its official policy discourse. One example is the landholdings that are kept outside the scope of official land reform policy. Closely related to this issue, it is necessary and urgent for peasant movements and their allies to organize and mobilize around the issue of land redistribution in public lands and reforms in share tenancy arrangements in a more systematic and integrated manner vis-à-vis the private land category of their country’s land reform policy. This is especially because the World Bank has been aggressively promoting policies to privatize public lands, a move that, if implemented as conceived by the World Bank, may lead to further inegalitarian land ownership distribution.

This study also suggests that peasant movements and their NGO allies must escalate and further systematize their opposition to the neoliberal land policies. Local, national, and international initiatives by peasant movements and their NGO allies against the World Bank’s attempt to implement its pro-market land policies are under way, notably those carried out by La Via Campesina and IPC for Food Sovereignty, but these need further consolidation and strengthening (Rosset, Patel and Courville, 2006).¹

Moreover, the findings of this study imply that while it is the main duty of peasant movements to develop and maintain their autonomy and capacity at a high level at all times in the context of their struggle for land and power, their need to build capacity while preserving autonomy poses difficult challenges for would-be allies, especially national and international NGOs and state reformists. These allies must respect and assist in consolidating these twin dimensions of peasant organizational power.

Peasant struggles for land and power in the Philippines, and in many parts of the world, have persisted into the 21st century. As long as significant
degrees of land-based exploitation, poverty, social exclusion, and rural political conflicts remain, these struggles will likely continue, and these will be marked by ebbs and flows. The dynamic ups and downs in the push for redistributive land reform will be determined, to a lesser degree, by the capacity of peasant movements and their societal allies to, themselves, launch political initiatives or by the technocratic state actors’ ability to carry out autonomous reform actions. To a greater degree, however, successful outcomes will be determined by the ability of pro-reform societal and state actors to forge alliances and launch joint and/or parallel collective actions for redistributive land reform.

Finally, this study has shown that the 6 million hectares of lands officially reported to have been redistributed to 3 million peasant households in the Philippines is unrealistically high. However, this study also does not support the pessimistic predictions and sweeping dismissal by some critics of the land reform accomplishment. However, the partial-but-significant land redistribution outcome that has been achieved, and whatever potential it has got in terms of poverty reduction and national development may easily, and could likely, be cancelled out by a convergence of interlinked factors: First, the rapid population growth rates easily overtake the rate of land redistribution; as some lands are redistributed to land claim makers, more new people are in need of land to be tilled. Second, while there is an ever increasing number of potential land claim-makers amidst shrinking political possibilities for further redistribution, the land frontier has clearly been fully exhausted—meaning, there are no more significant possibilities for opening up new farms out of forested lands. This makes the government promise of giving a piece of land to every one who needs it an empty promise and the rural social movements’ advocacy for the same increasingly problematic. Third, while some lands were redistributed to peasants, no significant support packages were extended to land reform communities. In fact the highly uneven process of social differentiation in land reform communities is now easily observable with many land reform beneficiaries starting to sell or rent out their awarded farmlands. Fourth, in the midst of insignificant public support to the reform sector, the macro-socioeconomic policies affecting the agricultural sector and the national economy are becoming increasingly hostile to family farms (see Borras, 2007). These issues are complex and should be the subject of a separate, comprehensive scientific study. It is, however, not totally without basis to say at this point that if these creeping problems are not addressed more fundamentally, any significant achievement gained through the partial land reform in the Philippines during the past two decades may one day soon be cancelled out.
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