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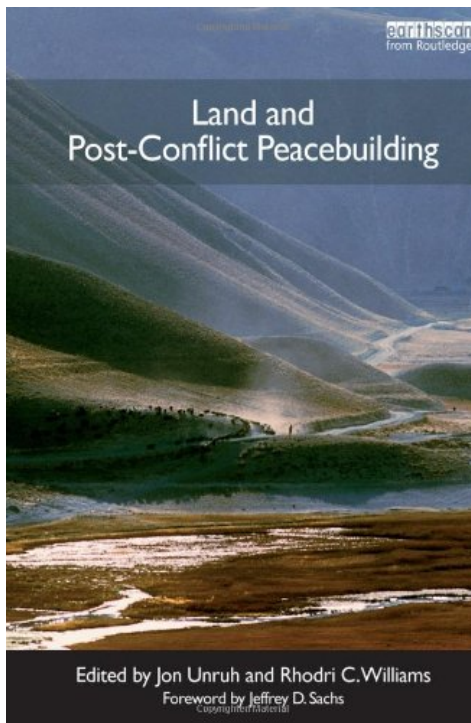
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### **Beyond land redistribution: Lessons learned from El Salvador's unfulfilled agrarian revolution**

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# **Beyond land redistribution: Lessons learned from El Salvador's unfulfilled agrarian revolution**

*Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque*

Control of El Salvador's agricultural land has been the single most divisive issue in the country for the past two centuries. Revolts and insurgencies for which land was a dominant mobilizing narrative punctuated the time between the Salvadoran government's abolition of corporatist landholding in 1881–1882 and the civil war that ended with the Chapultepec Peace Accords on January 16, 1992. While there has been relatively little political violence directly associated with the land issue since 1992, the issue has not been resolved or removed from the public consciousness. The failure to address widespread rural landlessness and poverty is a lingering legacy of the post-accord period. However, instead of armed groups taking up these causes, civil society has emerged with more strength, thanks to the unprecedented opening of democratic space. The creation of such space through the peace accord and the United Nations–sponsored post-conflict peacebuilding is in itself revolutionary. Democratization has not ended rural poverty. But the peace agreement and post-conflict monitoring by the international community effectively demobilized the rebels and dismantled a notoriously repressive security apparatus—creating a new police force, reducing the size of the armed forces by more than half, and putting both under civilian control. The accord also was successful in transforming the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional, or FMLN) from a rebel military force into a viable political party.

However, the Chapultepec Peace Accords failed to produce revolutionary results, let alone a “negotiated revolution” (Karl 1992), when addressing the socioeconomic inequalities that have fuelled tensions in El Salvador. This is particularly true with regard to land distribution. Nearly two decades after the end of the civil war, rural poverty, violence, and landlessness remain a reality for Salvadorans. And while the conflict has ended, it can be argued that peace has not been consolidated. More Salvadorans died violently in the decade following the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords than in the last decade of the civil

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war (Wallace 2000; Bourgois 2001). Although the rate has fallen dramatically, as of 2008 El Salvador retained the dubious distinction of having one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world: 55.3 per 100,000 population (OSAC 2009). The interpersonal violence witnessed today remains fundamentally rooted in a history of brutal oppression and persisting poverty, inequity, and social disinvestment (Bourgois 2001).

Hopes of fixing such inequalities were linked to the negotiation of new land reforms through the peace accords.<sup>1</sup> As such, El Salvador's 1992–1997 Land Transfer Program, known as El Programa de Transferencia de Tierras (PTT), provides a unique lens to examine the challenges of managing expectations of resource access in a context of scarcity.

Land scarcity in El Salvador is of two types. The first, structural scarcity, emerges from a historical legacy of marginalization of the rural poor through the elite capture of valuable land resources, the violent repression of social movements by the state, and the redistribution of marginal lands to appease regular rural uprisings while perpetuating the cycles of poverty. Structural scarcity was formally cemented during the negotiation of the peace accords, when the FMLN acquiesced to the government's demand that the 1983 constitution be upheld, essentially preserving the landed elites' hold on the country's most valuable land. As a result, only lands that were willingly sold by former owners would be subject to distribution through the PTT. These limited lands were then made available to some (but not all) former combatants from both sides of the conflict and civilian supporters of the FMLN. The programs and reconstruction efforts left many of the rural poor (especially but not only excombatants and FMLN supporters) with a sense of unfulfilled revolutionary promise (Bourgois 2001; Binford 2002; Ozerdem 2009).

The second type of scarcity is physical, resulting from a growing population and a limited amount of viable agricultural land. This has led to settlement on marginal lands (such as hillsides and areas with poor soils) and an unsustainable intensification of agriculture on small parcels.

Faced with these fundamental constraints on potential land reform, the parties involved in El Salvador's peace negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding process proved unable to build strong foundations for smallholder agricultural livelihoods or significantly address rural poverty. This case study examines the role of land as a political tool for post-conflict peacebuilding; it finds that the inability to move beyond the redistribution of land has limited prospects for stability and viable rural livelihoods.

This chapter presents an overview of land relations in El Salvador from the abolition of collective holdings in the 1870s and 1880s to state-led land reform in the 1980s, giving historical context to the structural and physical scarcities that shape contemporary land relations. It examines how the peace negotiations

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<sup>1</sup> As with most peace agreements, there were multiple rounds of negotiations and agreements that culminated in the Chapultepec Peace Accords in January 1992.



cemented structural scarcity as a condition for peace and identifies the challenges that undermined the PTT's potential for creating viable livelihoods for smallholder agriculturalists. It then discusses the inability of the peacebuilding process to address the wider issue of rural poverty and disenfranchisement, and ends with a review of lessons that can be learned from El Salvador's experience.

## **A CONTEXT FOR REBELLION**

While the colonial and precolonial periods left an indelible trace on the social and economic structures of contemporary El Salvador, this chapter will primarily focus on the period beginning with the emergence of the Salvadoran coffee economy in the nineteenth century.

A liberalism-inspired movement among elites in recently independent El Salvador in the mid-nineteenth century sought to strengthen private holdings to increase the production of cash crops. In order to achieve these higher levels of production, the government passed a series of decrees from 1879 to 1882 designed to break up collective land holdings. According to an 1879 decree, farmers would be granted a private title if they could plant a quarter of their farms with coffee, cocoa, grape, agave, or rubber (Browning 1971). Those who did not plant these cash crops and continued planting food crops would eventually lose their right to cultivate the land. Credit was not provided by the central government, placing the burden of investment on individual farmers and the municipalities (Browning

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1971; Posterman and Riedinger 1987). The 1881 and 1882 decrees attempted to accelerate the process of privatization by abolishing *tierras comunales* (customary-administered lands) and *ejidales* (municipally administered lands), eliminating all forms of collective and cooperative tenure. Ideally, land was to be redistributed to those who occupied it, and for some time, small farmers were the immediate beneficiaries of these reforms (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008).

This radical transformation undermined the security of tenure provided by communal management systems.<sup>2</sup> It was a catalyst for competition and divisions among members of the cooperative holdings, as individuals and families attempted to assert their claims to the best lands (Lauria-Santiago 1999). Adding nuance to the oft-reproduced historical narrative that this reform was uniformly resisted by indigenous communities, Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago suggests that it was welcomed by many indigenous and Ladino farmers, who would benefit from a “more secure ownership of lands that they farmed continually” (Lauria-Santiago 1999, 505). Due to limited state capacity, the responsibility for redistributing communal holdings was entrusted to local administrators and judges. The process was highly contentious in several parts of the country since the distribution was often influenced by competing commercial interests, political alliances, patron-client networks, and kinship relations (Lauria-Santiago 1999). In addition, it was not uncommon for officials to sell lands to speculators and large local landed interests rather than divide them into parcels and distribute them among the original inhabitants. Those with capital and knowledge of the law and the mechanisms of formal land tenure (such as titles, surveys, and bureaucratic procedures) used these tools to assert claims to former communal lands (Posterman and Riedinger 1987; Lauria-Santiago 1999). This may have led to immediate dispossession for some, but, as Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago reveal, a significant smallholder and peasant sector also emerged from the process and survived until the 1920s (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004).

The rapid growth of the coffee economy also played a significant role in transforming the country’s rural landscape. However, its cultivation was limited to the rich, well-drained volcanic soils of the central and western highlands, where the population was most dense and competition for land was highest (Browning 1971; Dunkerley 1982). Due to high labor demands and start-up costs,<sup>3</sup> coffee production favored larger landholders who could dedicate more of their lands to the cash crop instead of to food crops. In the first two decades of the twentieth century,<sup>4</sup> the coffee boom drove up profits and increased the incentive

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of privatization, these systems were already under strain from increases in population, competition with neighbors, and the establishment of lucrative individual farms on collective holdings (Lauria-Santiago 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Coffee requires a five-year maturation period between planting and the first harvestable crop.

<sup>4</sup> Coffee made up on average 75 to 80 percent of all exports between 1900 and 1922, further rising to 92 percent through the remaining decade (Montgomery 1995).

for large landowners to expand their holdings and for mid-sized producers to consolidate their production (McReynolds 2002; Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004).<sup>5</sup> This in turn put pressure on smallholders to sell their plots in these valued areas, squeezing out all other forms of agricultural production (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004, 2008). Increased profits allowed landowners to branch into other forms of agriculture—sugar, cattle, and cotton—in other parts of the country.

At the same time, El Salvador's population expanded rapidly, nearly doubling between 1880 and 1930. Within a few generations, small holdings became unviable as they were divided between heirs, reducing plots below subsistence level and forcing many farmers to seek wage employment or trade labor for land under the *colonato* system.<sup>6</sup> Smallholders were also susceptible to predatory lending from large landowners who took their lands if debts were not paid (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004).

By 1930, over 50 percent of adult men in western El Salvador had to hire out their labor because they did not have enough land to support themselves (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004, 2008). Increased landlessness in turn contributed to a larger labor pool, pushing down wages (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008). Ariane De Bremond estimates that as much as 40 percent of the country's land was concentrated in the hands of the landed elite in the decades following the dissolution of communal lands (De Bremond 2007).<sup>7</sup> Not only did more people depend on wage labor to support themselves, but relations between laborers and landowners deteriorated as coffee prices (and wages) plummeted in the late 1920s. Poor work conditions and a sense of recent dispossession, combined with increasing social distance from landowners, produced an environment that was ideal for organized resistance to emerge among *campesinos* (peasants) (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004, 2008).

The legal means of dispossession were also directly intertwined with the repressive mechanisms of the state. Between 1882 and 1932, at least five agrarian-based uprisings occurred in El Salvador's countryside, targeting symbols of the land reform (judges, local officials, and landowners) and those perceived to have benefited from it (Browning 1971; Lauria-Santiago 1999; McReynolds 2002). These uprisings were rapidly (and often brutally) quelled by state security forces, culminating in a massive campesino uprising in 1932, famously led by Farabundo

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<sup>5</sup> A few particularly savvy mid-scale commercial producers benefited enormously from this growth in the sector and were able to join the elite through expansion, despite having emerged from relatively modest holdings (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Under the *colonato* system, landowners would grant peasants a small parcel of land for subsistence crops or food in exchange for their labor on the plantation. This institution was known to be particularly exploitative in that it was often characterized by a lack of wages and limited physical and social mobility, ensuring labor commitments to large landowners (Browning 1971; Simon and Stephens 1981; De Bremond 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Between 1880 and 1930, most of the concentration of land occurred in the western and central highlands. In eastern El Salvador (especially northern Morazán), most peasant farmers retained control over their lands during this period (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2004, 2008).

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Martí. The army's crackdown on the rebels became known as La Matanza (the massacre) due to the killing of some 30,000 rebels and campesinos suspected of supporting them. The government also established a paramilitary force, the Guardia Nacional, which was designed to enforce the rule of law in rural areas but in practice was often the tool of landed elites. The Guardia Nacional was frequently used to disrupt campesino organizations and enforce vagrancy laws, essentially evicting those without formal title from their lands and forcing those with little or no land to work on large plantations (Browning 1971; Posterman and Riedinger 1987; Dunkerley 1990; De Bremond 2007).

Following La Matanza, the military government attempted to appease rural unrest by promising to redistribute lands to campesinos. From 1932 to 1979, the government redistributed a mere 62,000 hectares (ha) (Flores 1998). The program mostly legalized land occupations on a small number of properties that had not been effectively managed by their owners. Many of the plots given were of poor quality, and little credit or training was provided to the beneficiaries. It is estimated that most of those who received land were forced to abandon or sell it within a few years due to their inability to make payments or the exhaustion of the soil (Browning 1971). The coffee and cotton booms of the 1950s and 1960s, respectively, only further fuelled this process of land consolidation (see table 1).

By 1971, small farmers' access to land in productive areas of the country was primarily limited to rental and sharecropping arrangements with large landowners (Seligson 1995). Jeffrey M. Paige characterizes many of these arrangements as "starvation renting" (Paige 1996, 130).<sup>8</sup> Under this system, it is estimated that,

**Table 1. Land transfers in El Salvador, 1932–1998**

Total area	20,720 square kilometers (km <sup>2</sup> ) or 2,072,000 hectares (ha)
Agricultural land*	15,560 km <sup>2</sup> or 1,556,000 ha
Population density in 2006	326 people/km <sup>2</sup>
Land transferred 1932–1979	~ 62,000 ha
Percentage of agricultural land controlled by the oligarchy in 1971	72–78%
Land transferred in the 1980s	295,694 ha
Percentage of agricultural land transferred in 1980s	17–20%
Land transferred 1992–1998	103,300–104,000 ha
Percentage of agricultural land transferred 1992–1998	~ 7%
Percentage of agricultural land transferred 1980s–1990s	~ 25%

*Sources:* Helms (1990); Flores (1998); McReynolds (2002); De Bremond (2007); FAO (2009); Ozerdem (2009); UNSD (2009).

\* Agricultural land is defined as arable land that is under temporary or permanent pasture or crops or temporary fallow (UNSD 2009).

<sup>8</sup> A minimum of 2.4 hectares would be necessary to make a viable income through tenancy (renting, sharecropping, or participating in the colonato system) (Vidales 1993), but more than 82 percent of those engaged in tenant agreements held less than 1.4 hectares (Flores 1998).



of the 37 percent of the rural population who had access to land for cultivating crops for their own consumption or sale,<sup>9</sup> half were renters, *colonos*, or sharecroppers operating on parcels of less than 1.4 ha (Seligson 1995; Flores 1998). Large landowners generally rented out the marginal, less productive areas of their properties. Those who owned their own land often fared little better: over half of the farms owned were on holdings of less than 1.4 ha, considered inadequate to sustain a family, forcing most smallholder farmers to seek employment on plantations (Paige 1996; Flores 1998; McReynolds 2002).<sup>10</sup>

The dispossession of the rural poor was so systematic that it is estimated that, between 1892 and 1971, the amount of land available to the majority of farmers was reduced, through concentration in the hands of the elite, from 7.4 ha per farmer to 1.5 ha (Durham 1979). Durham dispels the notion that population increase was a significant contributor to the reduction of average parcels for small farmers. According to his calculations, population changes over the same period of time only accounted for a 1.1 ha reduction, in addition to the 5.9 ha lost to elite concentration. Accounting for both these factors, average holdings for small farmers were reduced from 7.4 to 0.4 ha by 1971. To get a sense of the scale of the concentration of land, by 1971, 9 percent of privately owned farms encompassed 72.7 percent of the country's total agricultural land (Helms 1990; Flores 1998).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This includes those who owned their land as well as those who had access through tenancy.

<sup>10</sup> The level of pre-conflict landlessness has been vigorously debated in academia. A commonly used figure suggests that rural landlessness was at 65 percent (Simon and Stephens 1981). However, Mitchell A. Seligson argues that those measurements are based on an overly inclusive definition of landlessness (Seligson 1995). His more exclusive definition is based on an unusually conservative estimate of how much land is required to sustain a family (0.7 ha), and he eliminates most permanent laborers from his calculations. He argues that a 25 to 29 percent pre-conflict landless rate is a more reasonable estimate. Martin Diskin challenges Seligson's definition of landlessness as too restrictive and says it "employ[s] an extremely low limit for defining the land-poor" (Diskin 1996, 113). The more widely accepted measurement for land-poor owners is 1.4 ha, doubling Seligson's pre-conflict estimates from 25 percent to 50 percent of the rural landowning class (Diskin 1996; Paige 1996; Flores 1998). This framework derives its measurement from Roy L. Posterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger's use of adequate tenure as a basis for establishing economic vulnerability (Posterman and Riedinger 1987). This framework focuses on the value of farming one's own lands (without having to pay rent or relinquish a portion of one's crops, which would diminish the returns from the land), therefore encompassing laborers and renters within the landless category. Diskin adds that due to low incomes, both permanent and temporary laborers are economically vulnerable in terms of the types of returns the agricultural sector brings them (Diskin 1996). Roberto Vidales estimates that those who farm rented land need at least 2.8 ha to have viable incomes (Vidales 1993). Another 30 percent of farms were smaller than 7 ha (Flores 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Most of the large holdings were located in the densely populated western and central highlands (for coffee) and the coastal lowlands (for cotton).



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These policies of land concentration left only marginal, often isolated, mountainous, and generally unproductive lands available for smallholder settlement (Browning 1971; De Bremond 2007). It was unlikely that farmers and their families could subsist on these smallholdings without supplementing their income as seasonal laborers for the large plantations (Paige 1996).<sup>12</sup> These areas also tended to be neglected in terms of rural development (Browning 1971). It is no coincidence that the insurgencies of the 1970s emerged in these mountainous, marginal areas—the *departamentos* of Chalatenango, Cuscatlán, and Morazán—which remained FMLN strongholds throughout the civil war.

### REBELLION AND LAND REFORM IN THE 1980s

Several insurgencies emerged in El Salvador's rural areas in the early 1970s in response to growing resentment of the military regime's repressive tactics against labor unions, campesino groups, academics, and anyone else who publicly called for economic, political, or social reform. The groups drew on a range of ideologies, from Catholic liberation theology to indigenous nationalism to socialism and communism (North 1981; McReynolds 2002; Ozerdem 2009). Most of these groups recruited from and were supported by the peasantry. As a result, they emphasized the need for transformative land reform as a mobilizing narrative to attract followers (Villalobos 1989). The respective movements gained traction following the 1972 presidential elections, which were widely believed to have been rigged in favor of the military regime's candidate, General Arturo A. Molina. The other candidate had built a coalition of centrist Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and communists and had promised full-scale land reform, but narrowly lost. After the election, Molina pledged to enact some land reforms, following intensifying pressure from campesino organizations. It has been argued that the regime's subsequent failure to deliver on its pledges energized guerrilla groups, allowing them to escalate their low-intensity insurrection to more overt acts of rebellion (Posterman and Riedinger 1987; Paris 2004).

In October 1979, a group of reformist military officers led a coup against the military leadership and established a civilian-military junta, the first time since 1931 that El Salvador was not run exclusively by the military. The October junta fell apart in January 1980 as civilian members resigned over increasing repression by state security forces and the inability to come to a consensus on land reform. The military leaders, desperate for civilian partners, cajoled the

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<sup>12</sup> David Browning describes this land as having thin and acidic soil, being subject to strong winds, and generally unsuitable to coffee farming, and therefore not of interest for capital investment by the government (Browning 1971). It was mostly settled by small-scale farmers, who had exhausted its productive capacity by 1879 through extensive deforestation and intensive cultivation and grazing. It is estimated that a farmer would need 10 ha of land on the poorest soils to sustain a family without outside work (Pearce 1986).

Christian Democrats into joining a new junta, promising rapid progress on land reform (Posterman and Riedinger 1987). The junta found a willing patron for its land initiative in the United States, which had been pressuring El Salvador and other Latin American nations to address the land issue to undercut the growing potency of leftist political and military ideologies (Harris and Espinosa 1981).

In March and April 1980, two decrees making up the Ley Básica de la Reforma Agraria were announced, paving the way for what promised to be a significant overhaul of the country's agrarian system. The reform was to take place in three phases, targeting different types of landholdings and designed to redistribute them to different categories of the rural population.

Phase I expropriated all properties exceeding 500 ha in size and was to redistribute the lands to the permanent laborers, colonos, and renters of those properties, via the formation of cooperatives. The original owners were allowed to choose 100 to 150 ha to keep for their own purposes, while receiving compensation for the rest (Simon and Stephens 1981; Helms 1990; McReynolds 2002). The redistribution transferred 215,167 ha (about 15 percent of the country's agricultural land) to 36,697 families (Flores 1998). The program mostly benefited those who had been permanent laborers on the farms, to the exclusion of other categories of rural poor. This was a major source of criticism in that it did little for the most vulnerable under the economic conditions of the times (Simon and Stephens 1981; del Castillo 1997; De Bremond 2007; Ozerdem 2009). The transferred land was not necessarily prime agricultural land, with over 60 percent categorized as pasture or fallow land or inaccessible due to forests or mountainous terrain (Helms 1990).

Phase II targeted holdings of between 100 and 500 ha and was by far the most controversial, in that its implementation promised to break the landowning elite's monopoly over El Salvador's most productive lands, covering 30 percent of the country's coffee and cotton lands (Paige 1996; McReynolds 2002). Phase II was never implemented due to the overwhelming resistance of the landowners. This resistance demonstrates the limits to the compromise that powerful elites were willing to accept on the issue of land. Phase I reportedly only affected a small number of landowners (Posterman and Riedinger 1987). Members of the landowning elite showed themselves willing to accommodate limited reforms as long as the core of their holdings and wealth remained intact.

The landed elites' coup de grâce on this issue was the implementation of a cap on land holdings in the 1983 constitution. Despite significant pressure from the United States to implement the junta's agrarian reforms (which would cap holdings at 100 ha), the National Assembly passed a constitution placing the cap at 245 ha, protecting the vast majority of coffee, cotton, and sugar plantations (Paige 1996). Lands exceeding 245 ha were to be sold to poor campesinos within three years of the constitution's enactment or would be expropriated by the government. This provision remained mostly unenforced due to political pressure and the instability caused by the civil war. It was also largely flouted by owners, who often hid the size of their holdings (Kowalchuck 2003a).

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Phase III was a land-to-the-tiller program whereby all sharecroppers and tenant farmers were to become owners of the land on which they worked. However, most of these holdings were small and on agriculturally marginal lands, often not even large enough to provide subsistence. Binding the farmers to these small plots neglected the land use patterns that characterized rental arrangements. Prior to this reform, renters rarely worked a single plot intensively. Instead, they shifted from one site to another leaving former plots fallow for regeneration. On these plots, they produced mostly subsistence food crops rather than woody perennial cash crops like coffee. The parcelization of lands in this manner meant that these marginal lands would now be intensively worked, increasing farmers' dependence on expensive agricultural inputs such as fertilizer (Simon and Stephens 1981). It would also exacerbate environmental degradation due to erosion, which had been a problem for agriculture in these areas since the late 1800s (Browning 1971).

In addition, the bureaucratic process of applying for a title was reported to be so cumbersome and complicated that only 31 to 42 percent of the intended beneficiaries received their land (Posterman and Riedinger 1987). The legislature also decreed that land not claimed through the application process by June 1984 should revert back to the original owners. Many applications were rejected during the process. In the end, 42,489 families received land parcels during phase III; 69,605 ha of land was transferred, averaging 1.6 ha per family (Flores 1998).

Those who received land during phases I and III were to pay the government for their properties over a period of thirty years with a fixed annual interest rate of 6 percent. The first four years would be a grace period for principal and interest. While the banks were nationalized by the junta in order to ensure a flow of credit to the beneficiaries, the costs of the start-up for many of the cooperatives were driven up by the right-of-reserve clause of the phase I reform, which allowed the former owners to select which lands to keep. Many of the former owners also removed most of the agricultural equipment and livestock from the lands,<sup>13</sup> or selected the land with infrastructure built on it, undermining the potential productive value of the future cooperatives (Simon and Stephens 1981; Posterman and Riedinger 1987; Helms 1990).

In addition, the titling process for many of the properties was delayed due to bureaucratic inefficiency and a lack of capacity in the government's implementing body, the Salvadoran Institute of Agrarian Transformation (Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformación Agraria, or ISTA). This undermined the security of the holdings, limited the beneficiaries' ability to obtain credit for production, and denied them the flexibility to transfer or sell their land if they so chose (Simon and Stephens 1981; Posterman and Riedinger 1987). By 1987, many of the cooperatives had been abandoned due to violence, a collapse in global coffee prices, and lack of technical and financial support (Helms 1990). The cooperatives that

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<sup>13</sup> Most of the lands from phase I were pasture lands that needed livestock to be efficiently productive (Simon and Stephens 1981).

persisted were burdened by the debt cycle that started in the 1980s; the beneficiaries of phase I owed US\$228.5 million by 1997 (Kowalchuk 2003a).

The stated objectives of the land reform obscured an ulterior motive that was revealed through its implementation. The land reform law was not only designed to address the economic and social issues plaguing the country, it was also central to the junta's counterinsurgency strategy. This explains why, on the same day that it was decreed, a state of siege was announced under which the rights to free speech, press, assembly, and habeas corpus were suspended (North 1981). The program was to be implemented through the joint efforts of the ISTA and the military.

The reforms were received with resistance not only by the landowning class but also by many of the intended beneficiaries, who were wary of the military's role in the reform (Flores 1998). The military was dispatched to the phase I properties (those exceeding 500 ha) to take them over for the purpose of redistribution; however, this process was accompanied by a repressive crackdown on campesino organizations, unions, and the general population by the same security forces. At the same time, attacks by right-wing paramilitary groups escalated, frequently targeting the intended beneficiaries of the land reform with illegal evictions, threats, abuse, and murder (Simon 1984; Helms 1990). Even government figures supporting the reform were targets. The head of the ISTA was assassinated along with two consultants less than a year after the reforms were announced.

The failure to implement phase II of the reform, and the lack of consultation with campesino groups before and during the program's implementation, indicate both a paternalistic approach to the agrarian issue and an underlying imperative to manage the agrarian-based unrest, rather than a genuine commitment to addressing the issues that fuelled the conflict. Therefore, the use of land reform as a counterinsurgency tactic was, in the end, too little, too late. As the junta began rolling out its plans for land reform in 1980, the disparate guerrilla groups independently fighting the government coalesced into the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional, or FMLN), evoking the name of the martyred leader of the 1932 campesino rebellion. By January 1981, the FMLN was able to launch its first major coordinated offensive, throwing the country into full-scale civil war.

By the end of the civil war, about 20 percent of the country's land had been redistributed, making this the most significant redistribution of agrarian resources and transformation of agrarian institutions since 1882. However, few who had been landless or economically vulnerable before 1980 actually benefited from the reform. Once again, the landed elites' manipulation of the state's judicial, legislative, and security institutions ensured their continued control over the country's most productive lands. This structurally imposed scarcity was combined with insufficient technical and financial support for the intended beneficiaries, reducing their chances of exploiting their holdings in efficient, sustainable ways. Even though communally managed lands were reintroduced, excessive debt payments and lack of institutional support had trapped the intended beneficiaries in a cycle of poverty.

## PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND LAND REFORM IN THE 1990s

By 1989, the FMLN and the government had reached a military stalemate.<sup>14</sup> Popular support for both sides was waning, as the death toll rose (by the end of the conflict, over 75,000 people had been killed) and over one-quarter of the population was displaced. The economy was in tatters due to the guerrillas' attacks on the country's economic infrastructure and the military's scorched-earth tactics in rebel strongholds.

Seizing on the impasse and the shift in the American position vis-à-vis its support for the Salvadoran government, the United Nations offered to broker a peace deal. It was produced piecemeal, with the 1991 New York Agreement and 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords containing the most significant provisions on agrarian reform. Although the peace accords as a whole were extensive and detailed, their provisions on social and economic reforms were sparse (del Castillo 1997; McReynolds 2002; De Bremond 2007; Ozerdem 2009).

Rhetorically, the FMLN insisted that agrarian reform had to be a central feature of any successful peace accord (Villalobos 1989). However, the negotiations rapidly revealed that no progress was likely to be made as long as sweeping reforms of the agrarian sector remained a central issue. The elite's fear of radical agrarian reform was one of the major impediments to progress on the peace accords. The Salvadoran government insisted during negotiations that agrarian reform would have to be accomplished by amending the constitution (which required approval by two successive National Assemblies), reducing the chance that it would pass (Karl 1992). As a condition for peace, the FMLN needed to recognize the 1983 constitution, which upheld the 245 ha ceiling on landownership. There was fear that pressing the issue further would spoil the peace process (Call 2002).

The FMLN spent most of its negotiating capital on assuring its political inclusion and establishing mechanisms for an overhaul of the security sector, both which it prioritized over social and economic reforms (Kowalchuck 2003a; De Bremond 2007). The elites' inflexibility on the issue of agrarian reform was

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<sup>14</sup> The Soviet Union's halt of arms sales to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1989 reduced a major source of military support for the FMLN (Karl 1992; del Castillo 1997; Call 2002). This loss was further compounded by the Sandinistas' loss to a party unsympathetic to the FMLN in Nicaragua's 1990 presidential elections, eliminating one of the guerrillas' main financial supporters (Ozerdem 2009). The Salvadoran government, which had been propped up by billions of dollars in U.S. military and economic assistance during the Reagan administration, lost support in the United States due to reports of crimes against humanity by Salvadoran security forces. The turning point was the killing of six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper in November 1989 by a right-wing paramilitary group, a story that was widely covered in the global media. Combined with the diminishing relevance of the Soviet Union as a supporter of Latin American insurgency, it became increasingly difficult for the George H. W. Bush administration to justify its continued support for the Salvadoran regime (Karl 1992; Holiday and Stanley 1993; de Soto and del Castillo 1995).

strengthened by their continued control of the state apparatus; the FMLN recognized that failing to dismantle those structures would inevitably prevent any type of agrarian reform. The FMLN leadership's confidence in the ability of the post-conflict electoral process to bring about necessary social and economic reforms was articulated in a 1989 article in *Foreign Policy*, in which an FMLN commander wrote: "The FMLN does not fear elections. Under fair conditions the majority of Salvadorans would opt for revolutionary change." He added that holding these free elections would "require a change in the balance of military power in the country . . . so long as the military balance does not change, social change will be blocked because the army will always act to reconstitute its power" (Villalobos 1989, 118, 121–122).

The FMLN's acceptance of the 1983 constitution within the framework of the peace accords indefinitely suspended the possibility for substantial, widespread agrarian reform by ensuring an insurmountable land scarcity that helped legitimize claims that there was not enough land to meet the demands of the rural population (Seligson 1995).

FMLN negotiators instead focused on creating a mechanism to legalize tenancy in conflict zones as a means to consolidate their political gains. Near the end of the civil war, the FMLN and campesino organizations actively encouraged their supporters to occupy and start working lands previously held by others (those who did so were identified as *tenedores* in the peace accords) within the territories under FMLN's control (Chalatenango, Cuscatlán, and Morazán).<sup>15</sup> By negotiating to legalize their supporters' claims through the accords, they stood to gain political credibility among other landless and land-poor people, positioning themselves well for the elections set for 1994 (McReynolds 2002; De Bremond 2007).<sup>16</sup> Provisions were also made to facilitate soldiers' transition to civilian livelihoods—inevitable given the dismantling of the FMLN's military wing and the Guardia Nacional and the reduction in size of the military—by providing them access to land. From this perspective, the transfer of land in the 1990s can be interpreted partially as a process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration that happened to use land as a vehicle for reintegration rather than a genuine effort at land reform.

On the issue of *tenedores*, the Chapultepec Peace Accords guaranteed that the tenure situation found in conflict zones at the time of the signing of the accords would be respected, protecting the *tenedores* from eviction until they could receive

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<sup>15</sup> Ironically, 60 percent of the lands identified by the FMLN for redistribution were located in Chalatenango, where most of the plots were already owned by small landholders with less than 3.5 ha each (Montgomery 1995).

<sup>16</sup> The peace accords established a cap on the number of beneficiaries for the PTT and other reintegration programs. Therefore, the selection of beneficiaries was often dependent on relationships with FMLN commanders and political alignments within the group, influenced by personal rivalries, and biased against women (Bourgeois 2001; Binford 2002).

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formal title to the land they were occupying.<sup>17</sup> If the original landlord was unwilling to sell, they were given the right to stay on their current holding until another parcel could be found for them. However, the boundaries of the conflict zones within which this provision applied were not clearly spelled out in the agreement, and therefore, the number of *tenedores* and the lands to which they were entitled were subject to fierce negotiation after the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed.

The Chapultepec Peace Accords also stated that the lands would be only made available if the original owners sold willingly—eliminating the prospect of expropriation, except for properties exceeding the 1983 constitution's 245 ha limit.<sup>18</sup> Like in the 1980s, landowners could choose which lands to sell. Not only did this limit the available land, driving up the price,<sup>19</sup> it guaranteed that it would be mostly marginal and relatively unproductive. Paige notes that the post-conflict stabilization of the rural areas and the subsequent increase in demand for land drove rents to new exploitative highs, further reducing the incentive to sell (Paige 1996).

The ambiguity in the Chapultepec Peace Accords was also a source of considerable post-accord tension and caused implementation delays. In order to accelerate the process, the government attempted to impose a cap on the amount of credit that would be made available to each beneficiary for the purchase of land. (The agreement established that credit would be made available, but not how much or on what terms.) The FMLN objected, arguing that this provision would limit the amount of land that could be purchased, especially as land prices were rising and the cap would be in the Salvadoran currency, the *colon*, which was subject to depreciation (del Castillo 1997; De Bremond 2007). The tension was also heightened by the government's perceived violation of the agreement in forcibly evicting *tenedores* from lands the FMLN claimed were within the conflict zones (Call 2002). In September and October 1992, the wrangling over these ambiguities reached its climax and almost ended the ceasefire. The FMLN halted the demobilization of its forces in protest, and the government responded in kind.

Many of these struggles can be attributed to political gamesmanship. The government stalled progress and limited access to land in order to undermine the FMLN's credibility as an unarmed political force. By releasing as few assets as possible, it would deny the FMLN a key victory that would have strengthened its support among the rural masses in the period leading up to the election (Córdova-Macías 2001; De Bremond 2007).

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<sup>17</sup> According to Graciana del Castillo, one of the UN's chief architects of the PTT, guaranteeing the rights of the *tenedores* was intended to put pressure on the landlords to sell their lands, assuming that if they refused, the *tenedores* would still occupy the land for a long time before they were relocated (del Castillo 1997).

<sup>18</sup> State lands would also be made available for redistribution; however, these only amounted to 17,500 ha. Even six years after the signing of the accords, many properties exceeding the constitutional limit remained in the possession of elites (Kowalchuck 2003b).

<sup>19</sup> The high demand and low supply after the civil war caused land prices to multiply five or six times (McReynolds 2002; De Bremond 2007; Ozerdem 2009).



The impasse was resolved by a UN-brokered deal on October 13, 1992, that clarified many of these ambiguities and defused many of the tensions. This included a cap on the size of lands to which beneficiaries would be entitled, which would be determined on a sliding scale, depending on the quality of land (UNDPI 1995). Despite ardent protests by the FMLN that this cap would trap beneficiaries in the same patterns of poverty that existed before the civil war, the international community pressured both parties heavily to accept the deal. Under the PTT, the maximum amount of highest-quality land that could be acquired was 1.4 ha, while the lowest-quality land would be capped at 4.9 ha. The agreement reduced the number of beneficiaries requested by the FMLN, establishing that 25,000 *tenedores* and 22,500 *excombatants* (from both sides) would have access to benefits. It calculated a 50 to 65 percent shortfall in land to cover the (already reduced) number of beneficiaries, based on lands already made available prior to the October 13 agreement, but failed to establish how this was to be filled. The payment structure for the lands drew on the *Ley Basica* of the 1980s. Once again, the land would be sold, not given to the beneficiaries. Loan agreements from the Agricultural Development Bank were based on the category of beneficiary, with terms somewhat favoring former combatants (McReynolds 2002).<sup>20</sup>

However, even after the October 13, 1992, agreement, the implementation of the PTT progressed slowly for several reasons. First, there was insufficient financial commitment by the international community to support the programs. According to Alpaslan Ozerdem, there were signs of donor fatigue as early as 1993–1994, less than two years after the Chapultepec Peace Accords had been signed, hindering the government's ability to implement reintegration programs (Ozerdem 2009). The funding gap between what was pledged and what was actually donated for the period of 1993–1996 was US\$600 million. The institutions also lacked the technical proficiency to deliver titles efficiently, and the process was slowed by an antiquated bureaucratic apparatus (del Castillo 1997; Call 2002; McReynolds 2002). Graciana del Castillo suggests that the slow implementation of titling reflected not only financial constraints but also a lack of institutional and political will to accommodate the beneficiaries of the PTT (del Castillo 1997).

This argument has some value, considering the systems put into place would ultimately undermine the future viability of beneficiaries' livelihoods. Although nothing in the October 13 agreement or Chapultepec Peace Accords stipulated this requirement, the government and lending agencies also refused to distribute production credit until the beneficiaries held a title; however, by October 1994, only one-quarter of intended beneficiaries had successfully received one. These delays significantly undermined the ability of beneficiaries to engage in viable, productive livelihoods. Without credit or titles, the intended beneficiaries were caught in limbo

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<sup>20</sup> *Tenedores* would be entitled to 10,000 colones and would have a one-year grace period on payment of interest and principal. The interest rate was 18.5 percent over ten years. Former combatants were entitled to a five-year grace period and a 14 percent interest rate over ten years (McReynolds 2002).

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and had little incentive (or ability, given the lack of credit) to cultivate or improve their lands, since the security of their tenure was not guaranteed (de Soto and del Castillo 1995; del Castillo 1997).<sup>21</sup> Technical assistance was also scarce, which was particularly problematic since many of the combatant beneficiaries were unskilled in agriculture (Montgomery 1995; del Castillo 1997; Kowalchuck 2004; Ozerdem 2009).

The absence of technical assistance, the small size of parcels, the poor quality of land on which they were settled, delays in making production credit available, and the disproportionately slow growth of the agricultural sector due to policy neglect all contributed to the creation of a debt crisis for PTT beneficiaries and an exacerbation of the debt crisis for beneficiaries of the 1980s reform. In all, the agrarian debt of beneficiaries of both programs amounted to US\$400 million by 1997. Of the US\$400 million, beneficiaries of the PTT owed US\$100 million (roughly US\$2,800 per beneficiary), while beneficiaries from phase I of the 1980s plan owed as much as US\$228.5 million (Kowalchuck 2003b). While the FMLN and campesino organizations mobilized politically in the mid-1990s to get the debt pardoned, many beneficiaries were ultimately compelled to sell their lands or hire themselves out as wage laborers. This has resulted in a reconcentration of land, as wealthy landowners have capitalized on individuals' financial vulnerability to buy back the lands (Kowalchuck 2004; Ozerdem 2009).

An important factor undermining the viability of the land transfer program was the disconnect between policy makers and the intended beneficiaries. Several critiques have been raised that campesinos, labor organizations, and nongovernmental organizations were marginalized by donors (such as the World Bank) and the government in the design of the PTT and the National Reconstruction Plan (Foley, Vickers, and Thale 1997; Córdova-Macías 2001; Call 2002). Even within the FMLN, rigid hierarchies and the educational gap between the leadership and the rank and file often left many FMLN supporters with the feeling of being underrepresented or left out of the FMLN's gains (Kowalchuk 2003a). After the conflict, many former combatants and civilian supporters (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) expressed a sense of disillusionment in the revolutionary leadership (Bourgeois 2001; Binford 2002).

The sense of disillusionment in the post-conflict era needs to be examined in terms of the viability of the livelihoods created by the program. One of the lingering legacies of the peacebuilding process is the inability to stimulate economic opportunities in the rural areas, opportunities that would decrease dependence on land and the fickle agricultural sector. While the national economy grew at an average annual rate of 6.7 percent in the 1990s, the agricultural sector grew at a much slower 2.5 percent, indicating an asymmetrical commitment to development (Foley, Vickers, and Thale 1997). The post-conflict agricultural policies also failed to develop markets for small producers' goods. In fact, following the

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<sup>21</sup> These delays also had severe long-term consequences. A 1999 study revealed that families who had received their PTT lands earlier had lower levels of malnutrition-induced stunted growth among children (Brentlinger et al. 1999).

civil war, the government embarked on a policy of importing most of its food in an attempt to drive down food prices in urban areas, despite the fact that small-holder agriculture is almost entirely directed toward the production of food. The artificially inflated colon also undermined the competitiveness of Salvadoran agricultural commodities (McReynolds 2002; Ozerdem 2009).

Some factors have emerged to mitigate these declines in the agricultural sector. Since the end of the conflict, remittances have overtaken export earnings and development aid from the United States as the primary source of foreign exchange in the country. By the end of the civil war, remittances accounted for over US\$1.4 billion per year (Call 2002; Pedersen 2004). In addition, increased urban migration and nonfarm employment have diminished dependence on agricultural livelihoods.

By 1994, it was estimated that over 35 percent of the economically active population in rural areas was employed in the nonfarm sector (Lanjouw 2001). Participation in this economic sector has been correlated with lower rates of poverty than those for agricultural households, whether or not the latter own their land (Lanjouw 2001; González-Vega et al. 2004). Despite the presence of alternative opportunities, there remains a strong attachment to land as a safety net, so as nonfarm incomes increase, the demand for land also rises (González-Vega et al. 2004). In addition, Jeffrey Hopkins, Douglas Southgate, and Claudio González-Vega suggest that raising nonagricultural earnings decreases dependence on small-scale, environmentally unsustainable agriculture while providing more viable alternatives for poverty alleviation (Hopkins, Southgate, and González-Vega 1999). However, the ability to access these alternative livelihoods and the employment of better agricultural practices is dependent on educational levels, which remain low in El Salvador's rural areas (Hopkins, Southgate, and González-Vega 1999; Lanjouw 2001). Due to low availability of credit, personal savings and remittances appear to be a strong factor enabling households to diversify their livelihoods (Lanjouw 2001; González-Vega et al. 2004). The availability of nonfarm employment also varies by region. Close to San Salvador, as much as 50 percent of the economically active population derives income from the nonfarm sector, while the figure falls to under 25 percent in eastern departamentos, indicating a significant disparity in rural development (Lanjouw 2001).

While the period of rapid post-conflict economic growth witnessed a decrease in poverty levels (rural poverty declined to 49 percent in 2002), income inequality in El Salvador has worsened, as the poorest 20 percent of the population's share of national wealth diminished from 3 percent to 2.8 percent between 1991 and 2002 (USAID 2005). The rapid growth of the 1990s significantly slowed between 1998 and 2008, when the average annual growth of the gross domestic product declined to a 2.7 percent average from a 5.1 percent average in the preceding decade (World Bank 2009). In addition, poverty rates and inequality are expected to worsen due to the global financial crisis, as the flow of remittances is expected to diminish, eliminating a safety net upon which many poor Salvadorans depend (UNDP 2009). Claudio González-Vega and colleagues suggest that in periods of declining opportunities for nonagricultural income (opportunities that are often created through the

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flow of remittances), households become increasingly dependent on subsistence agriculture (González-Vega et al. 2004).

In addition to looking at the PTT from the perspective of land redistribution, it is also necessary to evaluate its effectiveness as a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program, for which it was designed. From a broad security perspective, the program successfully facilitated the transformation of the FMLN into a nonmilitarized political party. This abated tensions at the national level and eliminated the mechanisms through which the parties could wage further conflict. However, at an individual level, the economic insecurity of beneficiaries and the lack of consultation with excombatants have resulted in high rates of recidivism. While unfulfilled expectations regarding the transfer of land in Nicaragua's arms-for-land program resulted in the contras rearming, in El Salvador, a number of excombatants who were beneficiaries of the PPT were not able to go back into the FMLN and therefore joined armed gangs, known as *maras*, or private security firms (de Soto and del Castillo 1995; Paris 2004; Ozerdem 2009). Ozerdem and Philippe Bourgois suggest that violence has transformed from ideological and political conflict to criminality, yet this violence still revolves around the inequalities of the system, making El Salvador one of the world's most violent countries (Ozerdem 2009; Bourgois 2001).<sup>22</sup>

What is especially perplexing about these persisting problems is that the very structures of dispossession and inequality are being reproduced in a democratic environment in which free and fair elections have been held since 1997. What happened to Joaquin Villalobo's idealized social and economic revolution through the ballot box (Villalobo 1989)?

### FACTORS AFFECTING THE OUTCOME OF LAND REFORMS

In terms of scale, the PTT of the 1990s accomplished half as much redistribution as the 1980 Ley Basica. This limited scope was primarily a result of the structural and physical scarcities that have constrained Salvadoran land programs since the 1930s. The threat of renewed violence during the negotiations enabled the government to maintain the 1983 constitution, which guaranteed the landed elites control over the country's most productive land.

However, it was political gamesmanship between the parties following the accords that ultimately undermined the effectiveness of the PTT. Much of this jockeying was due to the ambiguity of the original agreement, which allowed the conflicting parties to limit the effectiveness of the agreed-upon reforms. While international actors played a significant role in containing and resolving these tensions, the rapid onset of donor fatigue contributed to the weakening of the

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<sup>22</sup> Lisa Kowalchuk notes that there remains some state-led and private violence directly related to the land issue: police have teargassed, beaten, and jailed participants in land occupations, and civil society activists have been assaulted and threatened (Kowalchuk 2003b).

PTT. Land redistribution requires extensive and sustained capital and technical support—first, to process claims and ensure efficient titling, and second, to provide the technology, personnel, and capacity-building programs required to streamline often archaic bureaucratic processes and provide training for beneficiaries. Financing delays also impeded beneficiaries' access to credit and titles, slowing their recovery and prolonging their dependence on food aid. Despite its limited scope, if the PTT had had sufficient support, it could have established a firm foundation for smallholder agriculture in El Salvador and a basis upon which to build a rural economy.

Several authors compellingly argue that the neoliberal policies that framed the PTT and the post-conflict economy undermined the programs and perpetuated the issues that fuelled the civil war in the first place (Foley, Vickers, and Thale 1997; Paris 2004; De Bremond 2007; Ozerdem 2009). They identified the trend in the first UN peacekeeping efforts of the 1990s, particularly in Latin America (Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador). The United States and the World Bank pressured the governments of these countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s to liberalize their economies and political systems as a condition of aid. These authors argue that it was primarily the combination of the market-led agrarian reforms and the liberalization of government services that prompted speculation on the land markets, insufficient investment in the agricultural sector, and the decline in government services. By failing to provide viable alternatives to agriculture-based livelihoods, these policies essentially reproduced the systems of inequality that fuelled the conflicts in the first place.

Ultimately, the lack of depth of these programs merely perpetuated an ongoing cycle of smallholder poverty and dependence on wage labor. In addition, the measures for rural development implemented during the post-conflict peacebuilding efforts provided few viable alternatives to agricultural livelihoods, increasing dependency on remittances from family members living in urban areas or abroad.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

El Salvador's peace negotiations formalized the structures that maintained an asymmetric access to land resources, cementing the structural scarcity of land in El Salvador. Despite being flawed, the Chapultepec Peace Accords were a success in that hostilities were effectively ended between the government and the FMLN and paved the way for a conflict-wracked nation to move into a new period of political stability. The international community's close monitoring of the situation allowed external actors to intervene quickly enough when disagreements over ambiguities in the agreement threatened to undermine the peace process. Yet political stability was not effectively translated into the economic and social reforms necessary to address widespread poverty and a sense of disenfranchisement.

Disillusionment with this legacy can be attributed to the fact that the promise of addressing the country's long legacy of social and economic inequalities was linked almost entirely to the redistribution of land. Faced with the reality that a

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revolutionary redistribution of land could not occur, domestic and international actors took insufficient steps to ensure that the dividends of peace would be accessible to a wider range of Salvadorans. The process excluded the majority of the rural landless from these benefits, while failing to manage their expectations of future reforms by providing alternative opportunities. As a result, many rural poor people remain dependent on insufficient land and unequal labor relations in a weakened agricultural sector. An effort at rural development would have also increased the viability of beneficiaries' livelihoods by developing infrastructure and providing alternative employment to increase food security. Instead, long-term economic growth and social stability were neglected for the sake of short-term political stability.

Many of the criticisms of the programs of the 1990s are the same as those raised in previous generations, indicating not only an inability to fundamentally change the control over the institutions regulating land but also a disconnect between policy makers and local realities and priorities. El Salvador's land redistribution programs have often been criticized for failing to engage campesino groups in the decision-making process, thus threatening the sustainability of peace. Interventions have been carried out on behalf of intended beneficiaries instead of in partnership with them, further marginalizing them from the process. These programs would have been perceived as being more legitimate if donors and government had included local stakeholders in the decision-making process. However, building these relations of trust will require strong leaders on both sides to bridge the gaps resulting from generations of alienation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Of the natural resources that fuel conflict, land is particularly imbued with a deep history of violence, control, dispossession, and especially grievance. In El Salvador, land and land-based resources (agricultural products) shaped the social and political struggles of the twentieth century. However, political opening, rapid urbanization, and remittances have transformed rural dynamics in the 1990s and 2000s. While net wealth has grown, disparities have also grown. Elite control over land has prohibited El Salvador's poor from becoming landowners. Land could have been used as a tool to build peace by giving campesino groups access to a resource that would provide them with a livelihood. On the other hand, the strong focus on redistributing land for livelihood generation led to the neglect of other options that could have contributed to stability and income generation for the rural poor. Resolving the roots of the problems that led to the civil war depended on an equitable redistribution of land, and because this was not achieved, addressing the pervasive problems of poverty and criminality will require a long-term commitment by the state and the international community that focuses on providing sufficient education and nonagricultural jobs for rural youth, access to credit for the creation of small businesses, market linkages for agricultural products, and measures to halt the pervasive environmental degradation in El Salvador.



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