



OUR LAND
OUR BUSINESS

The World Bank's Sham Conference on Land and Poverty

Ever year for the last fifteen years, the World Bank has organized “The Conference on Land and Poverty,” ostensibly to discuss how to “improve land governance.” And every year, the World Bank Group has been accused of financing projects that support often brutal grabbing of land and other resources from local communities.

This year, the 16th such gathering will take place in Washington DC, March 23 to 27. And yet again, the hypocrisy of their claims to be leaders of just and fair land reform will be called out, with opponents pointing to the impact of some of their recent investments in places like [Uganda \(2011\)](#), [Honduras \(2012\)](#), and [Cambodia \(2014\)](#).

The big question is whose interests the World Bank really serves. While they spend considerable time and money painting themselves as champions of the poor, the Bank has a battery of practices and policies that suggest a very different truth.

Firstly, patterns of investment show a systematic prioritization of the needs of large multi-national agricultural and financial corporations. Just last year, for example, the Bank created [a \\$350 million facility to cover the risks of investments made by the Silverlands Fund](#), a private equity fund that has been accused of financing land grabs.

Secondly, through its high profile [Doing Business report](#) and accompanying [advisory services](#), the Bank uses its considerable financial and political might to force countries to adopt “business-friendly” reforms, which focus on creating conditions that make it as easy as possible for agribusiness giants to get access to developing countries’ land and natural resources.

Thirdly, by commoditizing land and encouraging farmers to get credits through mortgaging their property, the Bank does not protect famers’ fair and durable access to this crucial asset.

For the Bank’s PR rhetoric to hold water, it would need a far stronger focus on the needs of smallholder famers, who currently [produce up to 80 percent of the food in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa](#). This would require measures to protect existing land users, including anti-eviction laws and recognition of customary systems.

The crucial role of smallholder farming in fighting poverty and bringing sustainable development has recently been highlighted by UN organizations such as [FAO](#) and [IFAD](#). In a world where economic and food prices instability is the rule, sustained access to land is a prerequisite to ensure livelihood support for family farmers and pastoralists.

Among other benefits, sustaining smallholder agriculture will help preserve the environment, enhance biodiversity, increase rural employment, and help realize inclusive development. These goals are threatened by the Bank’s vision of land as a marketable commodity and by its efforts to enable corporations’ exploitation of natural resources.

We therefore call on to all stakeholders, including the United Nations, civil society organizations, farmers groups, and trade unions, to reject the Bank’s sham Conference on Land and Poverty and denounce its attempt to influence land governance for the benefits of a few.