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# Transforming Rights into Social Practices? The Landless Movement and Land Reform in Brazil

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## 1 Introduction

The emergence and development of rural organisations claiming to represent landless workers and the rural poor in Brazil, and their ensuing political visibility and growing capacity to bring a vast array of forms of pressure to bear on Brazil's political structures has been one of the most intriguing social processes following democratisation, after the end of the military regime, in 1985. This article discusses the most vocal of the landless organisations existing in Brazil, the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Movement of Rural Landless Workers, MST) and the relationship between the history of the MST and the (possible) materialisation of rights in Brazilian rural areas. The article provides a brief overview of the landless movement in Brazil, and particularly the MST, from its inception to the present day. The second section includes some recent facts<sup>1</sup> about landless militants and rural families coming from settlements under the control of the MST in order to highlight the relation between social struggles of the MST and the formation and enforcement of rights.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on recent attention on the MST in the national press, this article asks if rights for the rural poor become visibly rooted and are transformed into social practices as a direct result of social actions promoted by the MST. This direct connection between social struggles, processes of democratisation and the creation of rights is supported by recent literature. As Brazil has experienced very vigorous processes of democratisation since the end of military rule in 1988, it is important to investigate whether social changes and political processes in rural areas actually produce new rights for the most destitute in those

social spheres. It is also crucial to evaluate whether social organisations claiming to represent the poor have been successful in their efforts to democratise rural regions and implant new rights.

## 2 Why land reform, why now?

Social struggles pursued by landless workers are the result of their mobilising capacity and their corresponding ability to enforce various forms of social contestation, which became more frequent, in particular, during the second half of the 1990s. These social processes aroused interest because land reform, both as a research topic and as a social policy, does not receive the same favourable attention it enjoyed immediately following World War II. From the late 1940s until the 1970s, coercive and redistributive government programmes of land reform reached their peak and were often seen by conventional wisdom at the time as a structural requirement to promoting capitalism and creating an internal market. However, intense and embedded processes of commodification transformed the conception of land as a means of subsistence into land as a resource destined to produce income or profit. Simultaneously, trends in urbanisation reduced demographic pressure on land and with time, land reform dropped out of favour in terms of government policy and general interest. Government policies in other cases meant that broad and often conflicting demands for land reform became less important. As a result, the Brazilian case appears to be a surprising exception to the general trends in rural land reform.<sup>3</sup> Some authors point out the virtual disappearance of land reform from the agenda of necessary social change and governmental action in light of the processes of

commodification and urbanisation described above. They emphasise that if land reform is on the agenda, then it has been radically transformed into a list of models for market-led land reform programmes (Bernstein 2002). Even in Brazil, where land reform still makes the headlines, a leading rural economist argued some time ago that this policy can only be sufficiently justified on social grounds, because land reform aims to offer only “survival opportunity” to the rural poor and no additional reasons appear to justify widespread reform beyond this.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, landless workers in Brazil are currently engaged in a myriad of political actions and forms of representation through a wide range of organisations.<sup>5</sup> Due to their growing mobilisation capacity and the range of actions implemented, sometimes with astonishing innovation, the theme of land reform is being given more attention in recent years by popular media channels or by communication initiatives generated by the organisations themselves. In addition, with the presidential elections held in 2002 and the formation of a centre-left coalition that now controls the national government, the most active and well-known (although not largest one) of these organisations claiming to represent the landless rural population, the MST, is facing growing ambiguities. The dilemma for the MST, in addition to discussions about its own institutionalisation, is whether or not it should act as an appendage to the government. The MST has accepted offers to fill official positions opened by the federal government, thus immersing itself in the political objectives of the new administration and stimulating hopes that land reform mechanisms can be accelerated throughout the country. Nevertheless, this integration also generated a tension in the face of slow bureaucratic decisions – which require a pace that is too normative and full of traps and loopholes to be used by threatened landowners. The MST, as a result of its integration into parts of the government, has been forced to curb some actions (against the existing government) which it used so frequently in the past.

Interpretations of the MST and its development are usually apologetic, whether made by Brazilians, but especially on the part of foreign social scientists. In both cases, it is apparent that observers are influenced by the, at times, spectacular capacity of the MST to produce public, visible actions with significant impacts on public opinion and

government structures.<sup>6</sup> It is inevitable, as a result, that there is a real sense of *déjà vu* when most of the literature about these themes is examined. The majority of existing work on the MST ignores the deep structural transformation of Brazilian agriculture and social relations in the countryside in the last 30 years or so. Most observers are not interested in “socially measuring” the MST in relation to other social actors existing in rural areas. As a result, most analysis of the MST ignores not only the weight of the MST *vis-à-vis* other organisations but also, and most importantly, lacks an assessment of its demands as compared with social practices typical of rural families given the limits and challenges imposed by a pervasive market economy so prevalent in the vast majority of the Brazilian rural areas. Usually, students of the MST have been overtly optimistic in relation to the real possibility of land reform programmes and the organisation’s actions to substantially modify the existing pattern of land distribution. Even more surprisingly, most ignore the fact that social demand for land reform has dramatically diminished in recent times, due to processes of urbanisation.<sup>7</sup>

If processes of democratisation correspond to ‘the introduction and extension of citizenship rights and the creation of a democratic state’ (Grugel 2002: 5) then its real test is to verify if rights exist, not only on paper, but also if they are real for people, which necessarily means a redistribution of power among opposing social groups existing in a given society (see Pereira Júnior *et al.* and Clark *et al.*, this issue). The struggles organised by the MST (and by other organisations) have indeed given birth to a new set of rights in Brazilian rural areas, in the form of new discourses, or in real normative terms which sometimes recreate social practices. But these are not immediate and direct results, emerging from a specific process of political contestation and conflict around new rights for the poor. Contradictions abound in this process, including an opposition between the ostensible defence of rights by rural organisations of the poor and their actual interests, which are not always so directly correlated. The final section of this article will explore these tensions.

### 3 The MST: a brief overview<sup>8</sup>

An in-depth analysis of the history of the MST, even if limited to specific regions of the country and/or limited periods of time, would pose a daunting challenge, given its vigorous social history, especially

after the mid-1990s. This section will provide a brief summary of this history. Nationally organised since the late 1980s, the MST has had a surprising ability to reinvent itself, according to regional variations and particular junctures, as well as an unparalleled creativity compared with other movements and organisations of the rural poor and hence its undisputed public visibility. It has faced challenges that are also more complex, since its social base is formed by “the poorest amongst the rural poor”, who usually have no permanent occupation or residence, are limited by illiteracy and are generally easy targets for political manipulation. Nevertheless, its central challenge is derived from its *raison d'être*: to exercise and create as much social pressure as possible in order to change a land tenure pattern in which control remains in the hands of a minority of landowners.<sup>9</sup>

Among an array of social movements that appeared during those years of political transition before full democratisation of the country (i.e. from the late 1970s to the signing of the 1988 new constitution), the MST has had a strong social identity and has been bold enough to define and motivate its social base. As a result, it has developed sustained mobilisation capabilities and its actions gradually acquired a marked public visibility. Having been recognised as a leading actor in popular social struggles, its actions have had fairly significant results. On several occasions, the MST has forced the federal government to create thousands of new settlements all over the country, even though the overall numbers themselves might not be so significant when compared with the potential land-demanding population (or when compared with changes in the national Gini index, which has been only slightly modified). According to available official figures, between 1995 and 2002, almost 300,000 families found their way into the new rural settlements and the current government intends to settle 750,000 families in the period between 2003–6 and reserve resources for another group of 150,000 in the 2007 budget, reaching twice as much as the previous government in five years. These results have partially materialised in some sub-regions, contributing to slightly better land distribution, creating occupational and land access opportunities for thousands of families, as well as generating new economic processes.

From a broad perspective, it is possible to divide the movement's history in four main stages, at the

risk of oversimplification, particularly from 1994–5 onwards, when its presence spread into the rest of the nation and regional differences in its repertoire of actions surfaced. *The first stage* is the formative years of the early 1980s, when the first landless groups were organised, especially in the Brazilian South. The MST was formally launched only in 1984 and its first national congress was held in 1985. During that first period, up to the end of 1986, religious individuals linked to the Catholic Church's progressive groups exerted significant influence and control and acted as some of the formal leaders of the MST. During that phase, it used less confrontational actions, moved often towards negotiation and exerted pressures especially on sub-national governments until 1985, when the inauguration of the first civil government ended the military regime. Non-violent actions were the rule because of the restrictive influence of Catholic collaborators. During this period, recruiting landless farmers was not very difficult and the MST grew rapidly in the South, based on the significant support of religious mediators linked to the Land Pastoral Commission and the operational structure offered by the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> Few new rural settlements were created during this period as a result of the first actions, but the modest number of settlements established served as a strong encouragement to enlarge the Movement's mobilising capacity in the Southern states.

A *second stage* emerged between 1986 and 1993, when the MST's actions became gradually more confrontational (symbolised by the change of its motto, from ‘Land for those who work on it’ to ‘Occupy, resist, produce’), with several clashes with the police and confrontations with groups of landowners' gunmen on some occasions. The new strategy was especially confrontational because the MST decided to reorganise internally and kept only landless militants as leaders, thus sidelining some priests who were still influential. The MST became more radical with the passing of time. Emblematic of this new strategy was a conflict that occurred in downtown Porto Alegre, in August 1991. A group of militants confronted state military police with a level of violence that shocked public opinion (during the conflict, a policeman was beheaded with a scythe). In this second stage, there was a political reorientation of the MST, which adopted a type of Leninist-inspired organisation, even transforming its newspaper (which existed since its earliest years)

into a propaganda tool, frequently sacrificing truth in favour of a blunt ideological perspective.

As a result, this period was marked by the transformation of a social movement into a typical “organisation of militants” and eventually into a political organisation prepared to defend socialist ideas and mobilise the rural poor. Land reform was still the core principle of the MST, but with the passing of time, the organisation started to add new foci to its main agenda, most of them far from the immediate interests of the rural poor. It became highly centralised and made several moves to broaden its actions and influence. The MST left the South and transferred its headquarters to São Paulo. The federal government then became its main opponent until 1988, when the MST abandoned hopes for a more ambitious programme of land reform by the new civilian government. Nevertheless, even if altered by a new political trajectory, this second period was somewhat fruitful, with a growing number of new rural settlements and new landless farmers recruited by the organisation.

The *third period* covers 1994–8, when a new political context gradually led to the resurgence of the MST as a national actor pushing land reform forward. The most important fact was that the MST finally “conquered” São Paulo, the most influential Brazilian state, implementing a growing number of actions in a large region of that state, called Pontal do Paranapanema. It is a huge area, with the capacity to install an estimated 20,000 landless families, if the legal imbroglio is solved and the state of São Paulo decides to act in favour of land reform in that area. It is an ideal target for the MST, because in the past it was fraudulently appropriated by large cattle-ranchers. A long judicial battle then started to define its legal status and eventually the highest Brazilian court decided that the land was public and the state was forced to offer compensation to those landowners to repay their investments. The MST was able to recruit landless workers and gradually started land invasions in the area in order to force the acceleration of land expropriation in the region. As a result, because this conflict has been occurring in the most important state of the Brazilian federation, repercussions were enormous and the Movement would soon become a natural social actor in all discussions concerning land reform in São Paulo, if not in the country. But other facts also helped to leverage the MST into another level of influence from the mid-1990s onwards, including

the growing numbers of victims in conflicts involving landowners, landless workers and state police bodies in several parts of Brazil. Two of these incidents were particularly dramatic and increased social pressure in favour of agrarian reform in recent years, e.g. the events in Corumbiara (August 1995) and later, the massacre in Eldorado dos Carajás, in April 1996, both in the Amazon area. Several rural workers were brutally murdered by police forces. Those events provoked a strong wave of sympathy in favour of the MST. The second event, in particular, had serious repercussions, since it was recorded by a television crew and nationally broadcast several times. Because of its influence in that context, the MST again changed its political motto, this time to ‘Agrarian reform: a struggle of all’.

A *fourth stage* in the history of the Movement began in 1998, when the difficulties for the organisation’s actions increased notably. Its rhetoric to justify not only the uncertainty of these years but also some recent daring acts has been to insist that all government decisions are intended “to criminalise” the MST, in a period, curiously enough, when Brazil was experiencing a democratic renaissance. Until the end of Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s second administration, this was the main argument used to justify actions by the MST. After Lula came into power in January 2003, it has become increasingly difficult for the landless leaders to find a rationale to explain their relations with the current federal government. The MST is facing growing ambiguities.

Ironically, the MST’s history over the last decade is similar to that of the peasant leagues in the years just before the 1964 coup. History seems to be repeating itself. From the polarising of political rhetoric to extreme forms of social struggle, through attacking the state and even undertaking ambitious “military preparations” in some remote rural settlements, the lessons of recent history seem to have been forgotten by the organisation’s leadership, when similar tactics by peasant leagues ended in disaster. During the Cardoso administration, the MST opted for a process of political radicalisation, which would be difficult to explain without considering the possibility that it is linked to an opportunist electoral strategy. Recent actions include: invading public buildings, occupying productive and efficient farms (which cannot be expropriated for land reform, according to the existing law), invading merchant ships to protests against their

Genetically Modified Organism cargo, or directly confronting other rural organisations of the rural poor in search of greater political control. All these controversial manoeuvres have narrowed the political clout of the MST in recent years, despite the ascendancy of the Workers' Party into power. The most significant aspect of this new stage in the history of the MST is arguably the reluctance of the Catholic Church to give its almost unconditional support, as happened in the past. Nevertheless, only time will demonstrate if such ruptures will lead to change in broader terms and erode the social and political presence of the landless organisation, or if, on the other hand, the MST will be able to politically reorganise and better interpret its alternatives and possibilities, in the light of recent changes in Brazil.

#### **4 Social struggles, the MST and land reform: some recent facts and actions**

Drawing on this brief sketch of the recent history of the MST, a crucial question arises: has the immensely rich list of achievements of the MST, especially during recent years of democratisation, produced *new rights* for the rural poor in Brazil? Is it possible to establish direct connections between the formation of new rights in rural areas and a new and more open political context, which began in Brazil after the transition from the previous military regime and an apparently solid democracy regime was installed? If a democratic political system is defined by its potential to create rights, then a more democratic culture should inevitably lead to more substantive rights. In the case of the MST, it is not clear if this linkage is straightforward.

This section summarises key news items about the landless movements over the past few months in Brazil in order to highlight the types of political strategies used by the MST and some of the emerging contradictions the MST is facing. A selection of newspaper articles on the MST provides a clear snapshot not only of the many political merits and achievements the MST may claim, but also illuminates many of the contradictions currently experienced by the Movement, by shedding light on the difficulties and impasses of social struggles for land reform in Brazil (see Box 1).<sup>11</sup> Above all, and more directly related to the main focus of this article, these press reports also suggest that the creation of rights in any social context is a complex social and political objective.<sup>12</sup>

#### **5 Conclusion: does the MST create real rights for the poor in the Brazilian countryside?**

The new items selected and summarised in the box are clear examples of some important *impasses* and contradictions faced by the MST, but on the other hand, they depict the merits and indisputable achievements of the MST and the social struggles unleashed by the rural poor in Brazil. The wave of land invasions promised by the MST in the aftermath of the municipal elections held in October 2004 is important. This threat is paradigmatic of two aspects of the current situation. First, the greatest political result achieved by the Movement in its 20 years of existence is the inversion of power relations between landowners and the rural poor in Brazil. In the recent past, in most Brazilian rural areas, landowners could enjoy the complete domination of all affairs in their regions, many times including the right to select and appoint public officers and thus control the political sphere of their rural settings. The MST has achieved a decisive change since currently, landowners are no longer completely free to impose forms of coercive domination and make decisions as they wish for the rural poor. Most importantly, however, the threat of land invasions has caused panic among large landholders because they are aware that there are only slim chances of reversing an invasion of their estates and restoring the *status quo*. If the land is not eventually expropriated (which occurs when the establishment is considered productive), the government will insist on buying it to promote a new settlement. If landowners do not agree with this offer, it will be difficult to sell the property because of its immediate devaluation on the land market, precipitated by the likelihood of another invasion. Land invasions, as a result, usually generate a dead-end for land owners, and this is a remarkable inversion of power relations in rural Brazil, as a result of social struggles by the landless families and their organisations. As a result, the right to have access to land was born in Brazil, breaking with a history of social domination in the countryside. These news items also introduce tensions in rights because they describe how the MST is announcing a wave of land invasions in the first year of the new administration when only 7 per cent of the new settlements being formed are under its control. This suggests that there is another

### Box 1: Summaries of Key News Items about the MST in the Brazilian National Press, September–October 2004

**Item 1:** *MST announces a wave of actions after the first round of the elections.* This article includes a long report indicating that the MST is preparing to implement several actions after the municipal elections are finalised including its intention to launch land invasions throughout the country. The article also includes figures to show that these invasions increased during the Lula government: from January to August 2004, there were 271 land invasions in the country (184 in same period in 2003; 80 in 2002; 119 in 2001 and 189 in 2000). These actions are concentrated in the poverty-stricken area of the Northeast, but also in the rich state of São Paulo. In another section of the article, the MST leader interviewed claims that this “wave” is planned to force the federal government to accelerate its land reform programme. He also insisted that the Movement decided to approve more land invasions as a form of protest against the orthodox and International Monetary Fund-inspired macroeconomic policies implemented by the Lula government. Just before concluding, the reporter adds that out of the total rural families settled in new areas by the current federal administration, only 7 per cent were linked to the MST.<sup>13</sup>

**Item 2:** In a separate article published in the same day, *Folha* reports that 140 landless workers invaded the federal agency in charge of land reform in the city of Dourados, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. They wanted to have their names added in the list of future beneficiaries of land reform initiatives in the state. They claimed to be linked to an unknown “family agriculture trade union”. The end of the report mentions that in another city of the same state, landless workers commanded by the MST decided to ignore a judge’s decision to leave a private property they had invaded, thus risking eviction by force.<sup>14</sup> As described in another report, published on a different day, 200 members of the “Movement for the Liberation of the Landless Workers” invaded part of a private property previously invaded by the MST in the rich city of Ribeirão Preto, in the state of São Paulo, creating an *impasse* between the two organisations.<sup>15</sup>

**Item 3:** In the period analysed, bank employees went on strike, demanding a better pay settlement, under the pressure of a continuing fall in their wages and a reduction in the labour force employed in this sector, because of modern technologies that replace human labour. On 18 October, the newspaper publishes a long report about this strike sided by a photograph where three women hold an MST flag inside a bank branch in the town of Presidente Prudente (São Paulo). One of them blows a whistle. It confirms that they are settlers in the region and they invaded the bank in order to demand rural credit for their agricultural activities.<sup>16</sup>

**Item 4:** In a one-page article (published in a Sunday edition), the newspaper denounces irregularities in the MST financial operations. It reproduces copies of bank cheques to demonstrate that the organisation had access to approximately US\$10 million in the Pontal do Paranapanema, between 1998 and 2004. From this total, one-third originated in public funds and the rest came from donations from international donors. It suggests that a substantial part of these resources was directed to the personal bank account of José Rainha Junior, an important MST national leader. It also relates how the satellite organisations that received this sum have entered a judicial appeal to avoid Congress MPs analysing the finance accounts of those organisations.<sup>17</sup>

**Item 5:** *Folha* published a report that the MST invaded an enormous property bought by the federal government in May 2004, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. This is a special case because it was formerly considered the ‘greatest soybean producing farm in the world’ and was sold to form new land reform settlements. It is said that the action taken by the MST was to protest against a new model of settlement proposed by the government, where each family would receive a small plot and would become partner in the rest where commercial products would be planted. The local leader of the MST disagrees with the idea and argues that the whole plot of land destined to each settler is to be liberated to any family selected in the area. The national MST, however, seems to be inclined to approve the idea of the government, under the old collectivist idea of socialising land to organise a large-scale operation.<sup>18</sup>



side of the successful history of this organisation: it has exerted stiff control of rural families in those settlements established under its influence and as a result of land invasions implemented by the MST. Undemocratic social control and a lack of transparency and accountability has been a regrettable facet of the MST from its beginning, especially its transformation into a Leninist organisation where only a small group of leaders, chosen according to fierce loyalty, made decisions on behalf of all the families involved interfere in all government attempts to establish clear rules of engagement. There is, therefore, a clear impediment to realising the right to participation, which would empower people to discuss the situation and to make decisions themselves. Looming in the background is a problem that has plagued the MST from the moment it was formed: the difficulties in assessing the representativeness of those claiming to be leaders of the organisation. At no time in its history has the leadership of the MST allowed an open process of selection and choice of those who would speak on behalf of the Movement and decide about crucial strategies. Accountability, open representation and legitimacy, are simply empty rhetoric in the history of the MST.

The second example drawn from the new items summarised in Box 1 reinforces the efficacy of tactics used by the Movement. It refers to the ample scope of tools, mechanisms and forms of pressure utilised in the history of the landless families under the umbrella of the MST. These include not only invading private or public land, but also public buildings, especially those in charge of the land reform programme. However, there is a second possible reading of these tactics. The landless that invaded the public agency in the city of Dourados, in the huge state of Mato Grosso, in the Centre-West of Brazil, were not linked to the MST itself, but to another unknown group. This means that other landless families who are trying to have their names put onto lists of future rural settlements have adopted the successful tactics used by the MST. Item 2 also refers to another article related to a dispute between organisations claiming to represent the rural poor, the latter one in the rich state of São Paulo, where a rival organisation (MLST) has invaded a property formerly invaded by the MST. This has created a second conflict, this time between opposing organisations of landless workers. This item refers to a new right now common in Brazilian

rural areas: the unrestricted right to political organisation, which has led to emergence of a long list of recently formed organisations and the virtual free space to form new associations, trade unions and organisations to represent different social interests in Brazilian rural areas. But there is also an opposing and “dark side” to this new right: it exposes a fierce and bitter dispute among these organisations to maintain a clear hegemony and control of social groups.

The third item in Box 1 demonstrates a new right-in-formation, that is, the right to information and to political association and support. The decision by landless militants and settlers to support a strike under way could be a sign of democratic vitality; a vibrant demonstration that the rural poor are now informed about “national issues” and are able to take sides in labour disputes. A clear right appears to be emerging where a more conscious citizenry, informed about social disputes and conflicts is able to reflect upon these facts and engage in direct action by invading a bank to protest against the position of the bankers. As in the other cases mentioned above, this is only part of the truth and, in fact, the three women holding the MST flag inside the bank demanded credit for their agricultural activities in a region provided with public funds since the creation of new rural settlements in recent years. Presidente Prudente, the city mentioned in this report in Folha de São Paulo, is the main city of Pontal do Paranapanema, where the MST anchored its actions some years ago and has been developing a strong strategy to transform it into the main region controlled by the organisation. As a result of a long list of pressures and actions in recent years, the MST was awarded many public projects and an empowered group of settlers has been constituted over time, establishing a new right to the region as a consequence. But a substantial part of the destination of government funds was not decided in a democratic forum and according to the interests of all new settlers, which raises some important questions about the transparency and legitimacy of the MST, as highlighted by item 4. A Congress commission formed to investigate the MST discovered that a substantial part of public funds approved for investment in the Pontal do Paranapanema under the economic cooperatives established by the MST might have been deviated towards another unspecified destination. Here the right to demand access to public funds and exercise

political pressure in favour of another sub-group of workers was guaranteed, but the right to be informed and to decide about public funds received on behalf of the settlers was largely ignored.

Finally, the last item in Box 1 mentions an imminent conflict between the MST and, curiously enough, the federal government. In May, an enormous farm was bought, to be later transformed into a new rural settlement under the land reform programme, the 'Fazenda Itamaraty'. The government, most probably with the agreement of the main leadership of the MST, is proposing a new model of settlement, where each family will have only a small fraction of land and the main portion will be collectively administered and planted, thus echoing old principles of collectivism prevailing not only inside the government, but also shared by the MST. However, the families themselves, when informed, reacted negatively and argued that they preferred the old style of receiving the entire piece

of land and using it in the way they wish; a social practice typical of rural Brazil. Rights here are represented as access to land and to public funds to develop new rural settlements, but a centralised decision taken by the government creates a barrier to these settlers to having their preferences and priorities respected. The transformation of rights, from legal formulation to substantial social practices, has encountered a concrete obstacle and a resulting conflict is under way. It will not be possible, for the moment, to engage all families in these new settlements, in actions that could transform their lives, because '(...) human rights are not only a language with which to represent demands, they are also a mechanism for thinking strategically. Such strategies encourage active rather than passive behaviour, and, at their best, empower the poor to analyse their personal situation, attribute responsibility and work out the means to improve it' (Molyneux and Lazar 2003: 14).

## Notes

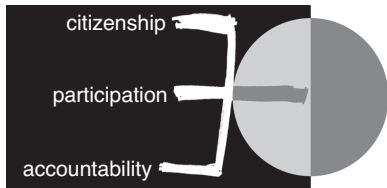
1. Recent facts about the MST were selected in a period of six weeks from the main Brazilian newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*, spanning from September to October 2004.
2. *Folha de São Paulo* is the largest and most influential Brazilian newspaper. It has a centre-left orientation, similar to *The Guardian* in England or *El País* in Spain. It is the only mainstream newspaper in the country where socialist intellectuals find frequent space to publish their opinions.
3. '(...) Sometime in the next year (...) a watershed in human history. For the first time the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural'.
4. See Graziano da Silva (1986). His argument is still more relevant if one considers that he has been a close adviser of the present president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the main brain behind the notorious 'Zero Hunger' programme launched by the current administration in January 2003.
5. A recent study shows that there are approximately 35 rural organisations in Brazil claiming to represent the landless workers of the country. See Mitidiero (2003).
6. The books by Branford and Rocha (2002) and Wright and Wolford (2003) are not exactly apologetic and represent fine overviews about the MST and its history. However, both accounts fail to grasp the real rationale that moves the Movement and, in particular, how to analyse it vis-à-vis broad trends in agrarian development experienced in Brazil.
7. This is a crucial observation made some years ago by the most important Brazilian social scientist, José de Souza Martins, but given the cloud of ideological blinkers surrounding discussions about land reform in Brazil, his words did receive scant attention (see Martins 2000).
8. This section is especially based in Navarro (2002) which will be published in English in 2005 (Verso Editions).
9. According to official figures, if considering the rural landholdings with 1000 ha and above, representing only 1.7 per cent of all registered properties, they share 48.7 per cent of the total private land area in the country. On the other extreme, rural landholdings with land sizes up to 100 ha represent 85.2 per cent of all properties, but their share in total appropriated area covered by land properties in Brazil reaches only 19.9 per cent (see Brazil, Agrarian Development Ministry, *Plano Nacional de Reforma Agraria (Proposta)*, November 2003: 7).
10. This Commission was established in 1975 and is an agency formally subordinated to the National Conference of the Brazilian Bishops, the most powerful Catholic body existing in the country.
11. This analysis draws on newspaper clippings from the main Brazilian newspaper over September and October 2004. All articles with direct and indirect mention to the landless struggles were examined and those with reference to the MST were selected and some of them are synthesised in Box 1. These extracts from *Folha de São Paulo* refer to different situations experienced by landless militants, by settlers under the sway of the organisation, to conflicts and threats promoted by the MST, using its recent logistical and social clout and even some embarrassing disclosure made by the press when analysing financial matters related to the main organisation of the Brazilian rural poor.



12. Because of space restrictions here, it is not possible to discuss many other reports published in the same period. They are many others, e.g. one gives information about an attempt to invade a court in Rio de Janeiro to demand a land expropriation in that state (30 September); another report deals with a discussion in a national conference of judges where there is a proposal to set up special courts to solve only agrarian conflicts (14 October) and a third report is puzzling, because it is affirmed there that a powerful economic group, led by the richest Brazilian businessman, proposes an agreement with the MST in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, offering jobs for rural settlers to plant trees in the large farms of this economic conglomerate (30 September).
13. 'MST anuncia onda de ações após primeiro turno das eleições', in *Folha de São Paulo*, 28 September 2004.
14. 'Sem-terra invadem sede do INCRA em Dourados', *ibid.*
15. 'MLST invade area ocupada pelo MST', in *Folha de São Paulo*, 12 October 2004.
16. 'Metalurgicos do ABC entram em greve a partir de segunda', in *Folha de São Paulo*, 18 September 2004.
17. 'MST movimentou R\$30 mi em seis anos', in *Folha de São Paulo*, 10 October 2004.
18. 'MST invade area comprada por R\$ 165 mi pelo governo', in *Folha de São Paulo*, 7 October 2004.

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# Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability

This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* features articles by researchers and practitioners associated with the **Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability** (Citizenship DRC), an international research partnership dedicated to exploring the new forms of citizenship which are needed to make rights real for poor people. The Citizenship DRC is a partnership which brings together research institutions and civil society groups based in Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK. It is coordinated in the UK by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), in Bangladesh by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), in Brazil by the Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP), in India by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), in Mexico by the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (IIS/UNAM), in Nigeria by the Theatre for Development Centre of Ahmadu Bello University (TFDC/ABU) and in South Africa by the Centre for Southern African Studies/School of Government of the University of the Western Cape (CSAS/SOG, UWC).

Through collaborative work with partners across national, institutional and disciplinary boundaries, the Citizenship DRC is increasing the voice of excluded groups in development policy. Current work focuses on building comparisons between different contexts to understand the mechanisms involved in making rights real for the poor. Cross-cutting themes are explored through three research programmes:

- Realising rights and claiming accountability
- Spaces for change? The politics of representation in a "new" participatory arena
- Citizens and science in a global context

## Recent Citizenship DRC Publications

- Abah, Oga Steve (ed.), *Geographies of Citizenship in Nigeria*, Tamaza Publishing Company Limited: Wusasa-Zaria, Nigeria, 2003
- Abah, Oga Steve and Okwori, Jenks, 'Nigeria: In search of citizens', *TFDC/Citizenship DRC Policy Briefing*, Issue 1, December 2003
- Eyben, Rosalind, 'The rise of rights: rights-based approaches to international development', *IDS Policy Briefing*, Issue 17, May 2003
- Kabeer, Naila, 'Making rights work for the poor: Nijera Kori and the construction of "collective capabilities" in rural Bangladesh', *IDS Working Paper 200*, October 2003
- Leach, Melissa and Scoones, Ian, 'Science and citizenship in a global context', *IDS Working Paper 205*, October 2003
- Houtzager, Peter, 'Who participates? Civil society and the new democratic politics in São Paulo, Brazil', *IDS Working Paper 210*, September 2003

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# Linking Rights and Participation

## The Project

**Linking Rights and Participation** is an action research project co-convened by the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies and Just Associates, Washington, D.C., in collaboration with partner organisations in Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. During the period of 2002–04 the project aimed to deepen critical understanding of rights-based approaches by exploring the ways in which different actors frame the links between rights and participation.

Through country studies, discourse reviews and workshops, the project examined what diverse rights-based approaches look like in practice, how these experiences compare with donor policies, and how rights are addressed in different contexts. How are development organisations shifting from needs to rights as a basis of their practice? To what extent are human rights groups building participation into their work? What historical and contextual factors drive and shape these changes? What new practices are emerging in which rights and participation come together?

## Publications

In addition to this *IDS Bulletin*, the following *IDS Working Papers* are available, and may be freely downloaded from: [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/)

**‘What is the “Rights-Based Approach” all about? Perspectives from International Development Agencies’**, by Celestine Nyamu-Musembi and Andrea Cornwall, *IDS Working Paper No 234*

**‘Rights-based Approaches and Beyond: Challenges of Linking Rights and Participation’** by Lisa VeneKlasen, Valerie Miller, Cindy Clark and Molly Reilly, Just Associates, Washington, D.C., *IDS Working Paper No 235*

**‘Kenyan Civil Society Perspectives on Rights, Rights-based Approaches to Development, and Participation’**, by Samuel Musyoki and Celestine Nyamu-Musembi, with Mwambi Mwasaru and Patrick Mtsami, *IDS Working Paper No 236*

The seven *Linking Rights and Participation Country Studies* are also available online at: [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/research/rights/](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/research/rights/)

***Linking Rights and Participation* is part of a larger IDS programme on *Participation, Power and Change* jointly supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC). For further information, please contact the Participation Group, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK, Email: [participation@ids.ac.uk](mailto:participation@ids.ac.uk)**



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