

## Supporting poor rural people’s empowerment through policy solutions for natural resource management and agriculture<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Three quarters of the 1.2 billion people living below 1.25 dollars a day belong to rural communities in developing countries. By and large, these are women and men who draw their livelihoods from managing natural resources – land, water, forests, biodiversity, fisheries – to produce food, fiber, feed, and fuel for their own use or for the market. Many of them face multiple forms of social, economic, and political exclusion, and virtually all struggle with limited access to productive assets, inputs and services. The link between improving natural resource management (NRM)<sup>3</sup> around agriculture and strengthening poor rural people’s livelihoods is thus clear. A close link also exists between achieving this and strengthening the smallholder and family agriculture sector - as this is, globally, the main form of organization of poor rural people’s livelihoods.

Much has been written about new challenges facing agriculture given a growing global population, dietary changes linked to increasing affluence, and a harsher environment - with growing scarcities (particularly of water) and a changing climate. By 2050, this sector may need to provide 60% more food (in calorie content) than it does today – a bit less if the world manages to cut down current rates of food loss and waste. For sure, it must dramatically scale down its environmental footprint while stepping up the provision of environmental services like carbon sequestration.<sup>4</sup> While doing this, agriculture also has to offer decent income and job opportunities to growing cohorts of rural youth – particularly in Africa and parts of Asia - and play a major role in reducing malnutrition. Meanwhile, new opportunities for financial and economic gain have been emerging in this sector, drawing in new categories of investors and rekindling the interest of governments and donors.

Meeting emerging challenges and harnessing opportunities for broad-based benefit requires vast improvements in rural investment, supported by policies that foster the alignment of economic, food security, environmental, and social concerns. At the same time, the actors operating in the rural sectors need to develop the capabilities to drive the needed transformation in NRM and agriculture. In this context, smallholder and family farmers – including poor farmers - need to be a central focus of policies promoting such capabilities, alongside all those who engage in NRM to support their livelihoods. Those who are held back from developing new capabilities by inequalities and exclusion – such as poor rural women – also require specific policy attention.

The task at hand is not a politically “neutral” one. As markets around agriculture and NRM grow more complex, segmented, and integrated across the world, unequal power relations shape access to opportunities and benefits – in produce markets but also in those concerning rural energy, finance, knowledge and technology. Long-standing inequalities are often reinforced by new market relationships, as well as magnified by new challenges and risks. For instance, large-scale asset acquisitions, emerging environmental pressures, and climatic hazards can all reinforce rural women’s vulnerabilities and their exclusion from opportunities to improve their livelihoods. Using policy to foster capabilities is thus inevitably also about promoting more equitable power relations.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been prepared for discussion at an expert group meeting on: “Policies and strategies to promote empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”, New York, 10-11 September 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Some elements of this paper build on B. Prato and R. Longo (2012). “Empowerment of poor rural people through initiatives in agriculture and natural resource management.” At <http://www.oecd.org/dac/povertyreduction/reducingpovertythroughempowerment.htm>

<sup>3</sup> There is of course also a vast agenda of empowerment around the management of other natural resources – e.g. mineral resources. This paper only covers rather narrowly the NRM-agriculture link, with particular focus on land issues.

<sup>4</sup>These challenges and projections have been reported in many recent publications, such as *Save and Grow: A policymaker’s guide to the sustainable intensification of agricultural production*. Rome: FAO, 2011.

New policy solutions to these issues are often needed, at times spanning different sectors and/or borders.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, institutional innovations are flourishing in market organization and NRM – e.g. with a trend towards multi-stakeholder governance approaches. Policy processes are in many cases becoming more participatory - rural communities are today often invited to take part in consultations around public programs or in the local governance of specific natural resources. Power differentials remain present in all these settings, although often masked by the term “community” or expected to be equalized through simple consultation exercises. However, opportunities to build new capabilities while also tackling inequalities and changing power relations among relevant actors are often present in these settings. Policies can help create such opportunities, but the “right” policies are always context- and time-specific. Conversely, almost everywhere poor rural women and men need to contribute more than they do now to policy processes and governance. Hence, an agenda of empowerment around NRM and agriculture is also an agenda of empowered and inclusive rural citizenship - whereby poor rural people act as right-holders as well as stake-holders.<sup>6</sup>

**To summarize, policies can contribute to poor rural people’s empowerment if they help build their assets, skills, and social capital to fully benefit from changes in the rural sector, if they help address inequalities and exclusion underpinned by unequal power relations, and if the processes through which they are made and implemented promote active and inclusive rural citizenship.**

This paper looks at some examples of how this may occur, with a somewhat narrow focus on agriculture and land policies. The goal is to illustrate some points, not to provide blueprints for good practice. For one thing, evidence shows that even good practice is always unfinished business, and setbacks are always possible. Both political commitment and active engagement by rural citizens and others are typically needed to realize whatever gains a policy may promise – whether in terms of building new capabilities, or changing power relations, or both. Moreover, good practice from a perspective of poor rural people’s empowerment is practice that they craft and that they – individually or collectively - assess as empowering. There can be no academic substitute for such an assessment. Accordingly, this paper will generally speak of empowerment “opportunities” (rather than impact) being created through policy processes.

## **2. Some key areas for policy focus to create empowerment opportunities in this domain**

There are many definitions of empowerment in the literature. Each may emphasize different aspects of power (“power to” or “power over” in particular). Many highlight “power with” – stressing the importance of collective action in many aspects of poor people’s lives. In parts of the literature there is a tendency to use the verb “empower” with poor women and men assumed to be on the receiving end (as “empowered” by others). Conversely, this paper is inspired by a definition presented by Eyben to a Task Team on Empowerment of the OECD DAC POVNET. Eyben defines empowerment as a process that happens “when people, individually or collectively, conceive of, define and pursue better lives for themselves. From a pro-poor growth perspective, poor women and men need to change existing power relations and gain and exert influence over the political, economic and social processes that determine and, all too often, constrain their livelihood opportunities.”<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis on the process nature of empowerment and on the need to change power relations affecting livelihood opportunities makes this definition helpful to see policy as an important part, but never the end point of empowerment. To the contrary, poor women and men *themselves* need

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, new transnational land acquisitions and/or land investments are affected by a complex set of (investment, land, trade, and other) policies not just in the “host” country but also in the country of origin of investors and at the international level. See L. Cotula (2012). “‘Land grabbing’ in the shadow of the law: legal frameworks regulating the global land rush”. In Rayfuse, R. and N. Weisfelt, eds. *The challenge of food security. International policy and regulatory frameworks*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar

<sup>6</sup> K. Swiderska, with D. Roe, L. Siegele, M. Grieg-Gran. (2008) *The Governance of Nature and the Nature of Governance: Policy that works for biodiversity and livelihoods*. London: IIED

<sup>7</sup> R. Eyben, as reported in OECD DAC (2012). Policy Guidance Note: The role of empowerment for poverty reduction and growth. At <http://www.oecd.org/dac/povertyreduction/reducingpovertythroughempowerment.htm>

to define and pursue better lives, change power relations, and influence processes. The emphasis on dynamic terms like change, opportunities, and constraints, moreover, encourages an understanding of empowerment as a process that may translate into different visions and pursuits by individuals and groups at different times in various contexts. To the extent that one may generalize, poor rural people's empowerment in the domain of this paper may involve gaining space and the ability to seize opportunities for better lives given new market trends and environmental pressures. However, this may mean different things for different groups of people at any given time.

Policy processes are one terrain where empowerment needs to occur, as it is one where capabilities and power relations shaping opportunities for rural citizens can be addressed together. Many types of policies may support empowerment. **In general, however, the key policy realms for meeting new opportunities and challenges in NRM and agriculture concern rights over natural resources, technology and services, markets, and political participation.** This is in addition to policies that directly affect human capital, which are a precondition for empowerment for all people. This paper focuses on the first and fourth realm, with particular attention to land and agriculture policies. Some key policy and empowerment issues in these four realms are briefly reviewed below.

### **2.1) Natural resource access and rights**

The first realm is especially critical today, as many emerging challenges in agriculture and NRM are related to the impoverishment of the natural resource base. The emergence of new policies and programs addressing this and other environmental concerns can create opportunities to strengthen rural livelihoods, but may also generate conflict and have disempowering effects for people with weak tenure rights (which includes most poor rural people). Population movement and demographic growth meanwhile may intensify pressure on resources, and so does the presence of new categories of investors in the sector. Conversely, secure control over productive resources is key for investment and to reduce risks associated with seizing new market opportunities. It is also often a precondition for poor rural people's participation in emerging programs rewarding sustainable NRM practices.

Limited or insecure access or control over land and other natural resources is a recurring aspect of rural poverty across the developing world. Also recurrent is the convergence of precarious access and tenure rights with broader problems of disempowerment, e.g. for rural women, indigenous peoples, and pastoralists. For rural women, for example, limited citizenship is often interlinked with limited control over land. Conversely, women with recognized and secure land rights are often found to be more likely to be active local citizens<sup>8</sup>. For indigenous peoples and mobile communities, poor access or control rights over natural resources are often interlinked with challenged in obtaining recognition of their cultures or their claims to relative autonomy vis-à-vis the state.

Traditionally, control over natural resources supporting agriculture is managed through a variety of formal and informal institutional arrangements. Such arrangements – based on custom or positive law, or both – may reflect multiple power relations and reproduce them more or less adaptively as rural economies change. However, policy gaps around access and control over natural resources are common. Policies around access and control over land, water, fisheries, forests, and biodiversity are often incomplete, ambiguous, poorly implemented, or ill-suited to new issues in the rural sector. The results of these gaps are often disempowering for poor rural people, especially vis-à-vis competition with wealthier or more powerful actors, and they undermine their investment capacity as well.

### **2.2) Knowledge and technology related to agriculture and NRM**

A second key policy area concerns how knowledge and technology are produced and accessed by poor rural people. Capturing new opportunities and responding to new challenges requires a transformation in skills, knowledge, and technology. Reducing women's drudgery in the care economy and in agriculture also requires – inter alia - focused technology and capacity development. And so forth. Today, the production and dissemination of knowledge and technology related to NRM

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank, FAO, IFAD (2008). *Gender in agriculture sourcebook*. Module 4. Washington: World Bank

and agriculture are often (perhaps increasingly)<sup>9</sup> shaped by power relations on which poor rural people have little or no influence. Moreover, technology and knowledge initiated and owned by poor rural people are little supported in formal R&D systems. In recent years, farmers' organizations, NGOs, and others have called for a democratization of governance of agriculture R&D, but this is a vast and complex agenda, particularly when moving beyond local instances of "democratization" or specific international initiatives and networks.<sup>10</sup> Beyond the agriculture sector, the quality of rural education also remains problematic in many countries.

Policies regulating, setting directions and incentives, and defining budget allocations for R&D, extension, and rural and agricultural education can contribute to empowerment depending on whether the needs of poor rural people (and more generally those of smallholder and family agriculture) are addressed, their capabilities as NRM actors in a new environment enhanced, and their capacity to contribute to generating knowledge in this sector recognized. Much R&D and/or extension work nowadays occurs in the private sector, but policies can have influence on it in various ways— for instance by setting targets for progress towards sustainable NRM, productivity growth in smallholder and family agriculture, self sufficiency for specific crops or livestock products, and so forth. Policy incentives or de-risking tools can also be used to influence private R&D and extension markets to enhance positive impact on poor rural people's livelihoods.

### **2.3) Markets**

A third key area of policy focus around empowerment of poor rural people concerns markets, as it is here that most opportunities and constraints for better rural livelihoods are generated, and where power relations constraining positive change are partly embedded. Much has been written on the ongoing transformation of markets for food and other agricultural products, notably their growing integration and organization both at the country level and internationally. Markets for inputs, services, and labor in the NRM and agriculture sector are also undergoing transformation alongside produce markets. Also potentially significant from an empowerment perspective is the emergence of markets for environmental services such as carbon sequestration. However, the majority of poor rural people mostly participate in a variety of informal markets – indeed, some authors are calling for more policy attention to supporting small farmers' agency in these markets.<sup>11</sup>

Challenges for poor rural people's participation and influence on markets vary. Modern supply chains often present important power asymmetries and may have high entry requirements, which risk excluding poor producers. While new livelihood opportunities may be created by these chains, poor rural people – especially if unorganized – are rarely able to shape the terms on which they access them. The results of this inability may be precarious, poorly paid jobs, over-dependence on a single buyer, reduced use of risk reduction strategies like farm-level diversification, etc. Meanwhile, insecure control over natural resources, inadequate access to knowledge, technology, services, and finance, hinder poor rural people's market access. Women producers and entrepreneurs are often most constrained in this regard for these and other reasons. Power asymmetries and access barriers also exist in emerging markets for environmental services. Traditional markets, where most poor rural people operate, are also characterized by unequal power distribution.

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<sup>9</sup> See for instance Bhutani, S. (2013) *Re-Searching Agriculture in South Asia: The law and policy context for agricultural research and development and its impact on smallholder farmers*. IIED, London

<sup>10</sup> This call has been made in several publications in the past few years, including the well known 2009 IAASTD report. See also the international action-research initiative on "Democratizing the Governance of Food Systems. Citizens Rethinking Food and Agricultural Research for the Public Good," which started in 2007 in parts of West Africa, the Andean region in Latin America, South and West Asia, to create spaces of citizenship where stakeholders (notably farmers and rural groups) can debate priorities for agricultural research, science and technology and discuss them with policymakers. (Documented for instance in M. Pimbert, B. Barry, A. Berson and K. Tran-Thanh, 2010. *Democratizing Agricultural Research for Food Sovereignty in West Africa*. IIED, CNOP, Centre Djoliba, IRPAD, Kene Conseils, URTEL, Bamako and London.)

<sup>11</sup> Vorley, B. (2013), *Meeting small-scale farmers in their markets: understanding and improving the institutions and governance of informal agrifood trade*, IIED/HIVOS/Mainumby, London/The Hague/La Paz.

Policies can affect the empowerment of poor rural people in markets from a variety of angles – in setting property rights and how they can be acquired and transacted, in defining contract laws and mechanisms to enforce them, in affecting prices, in promoting (or not) competition, in defining norms for labor organization and for decent work (as well as the care economy), and in facilitating (or not) poor rural people’s access to assets, knowledge, and services. At present, in many countries the policy environment concerning property rights, contracts, labor, professional associations, and finance (inter alia) presents gaps, contradictions, or heavily bureaucratic implementation and enforcement, often accompanied by corruption. The needs and interests of small rural entrepreneurs and workers are also rarely well served by existing policies in all these realms.

#### **2.4) Policy and political processes**

The need to enhance poor rural people’s participation in policy and governance processes has been noted. Part of the challenge is about poor rural constituencies being seen by official decision-makers as legitimate right- and stake-holders in these processes. Whether this happens has to do with the political history, prevailing political discourses, political regime, and leadership of each country or area within country. It also owes to whether all groups in rural societies have access to civil and political rights concerning association, free speech, information, voting, or running for office.

Having formal civil and political rights is essential for rural empowerment, though it is no guarantee that rights will be used.<sup>12</sup> For marginalized rural groups, in particular, and for rural women more often than for men, realizing such rights is often difficult. For instance, rural women may not be in a position to realize their political rights due to illiteracy, mobility restrictions, cultural and social expectations, time poverty, or other. When freedom of association is recognized, the complexity and costs of legal registration may be an impediment for rural poor people when it comes to setting up, for instance, a farmers’ association. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities often face discrimination if their language and institutions are not recognized in political processes. Rural women who stand for elections at times face intimidation or violence,<sup>13</sup> and the same often happens to rural movements in undemocratic countries or fragile situations. Documenting the right to engage in a given decision-making process is at times a challenge in itself. For instance, obtaining identity cards, registering on electoral rolls, registering children’s births or land may require “the equivalent of several weeks or months of agricultural income or (...) time off to go to the relevant offices (...)”<sup>14</sup> Lack of organization and diversity of interests among rural societies, and limited inclusiveness of rural organizations, can also undermine the realization of civil and political rights.

Using rights is of course far from being a guarantee of influence. Obstacles may be of a formal nature – e.g. absence of democratic debate, technocratic policymaking, and so forth. In policy processes around climate change or the environment, for instance, debates are often very technical and easily dominated by “experts.” Other obstacles may be related to political economy and the political marginalization of rural constituencies (especially those living in poverty). The complexity and non-linearity of policy processes also complicates efforts to influence outcomes, especially in the absence of strong, well-networked, well-funded organizations representing rural constituencies. Consider for instance the elaboration of agriculture or food security plans. When not entrusted to a small group of experts and bureaucrats, actors in these processes may include line ministries, the presidential office, parliament, donors, the corporate sector, and representatives of rural communities or producers’ groups. If done through broad-based consultations, the preparation of the plans can be a long and complex affair, which may include several stages of debate and many decision points, some of them outside the formal process. When consultations involve rural

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<sup>12</sup> This may be due to choice but also to a number of “barriers to access” (to policy and decision making processes, via information, participation opportunities, and justice), as analyzed for instance in Foto, J. and L. de Silva (2010). *A Seat at the Table: Including the Poor in Decisions for Development and Environment*. Washington, DC: WRI

<sup>13</sup> *Gender and Agriculture Sourcebook, Module 2 – Gender and Agricultural Livelihoods: Strengthening Governance*. World Bank, FAO, IFAD, 2008, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Faye, J. (2008) *Land and decentralisation in Senegal*. IIED Issue Paper No. 149, p. 4.

constituencies, there are plenty of opportunities for mis-aggregation or mis-translation of their input to decision-making centers. And even in the event of a plan reflecting the inputs of poor rural people or other rural constituencies (e.g. smallholder farmers), adequate allocation of responsibilities, powers, and resources for implementation must then follow, and other concerns and interests may take over at that stage. In the absence of provisions for gender sensitive budgeting and implementation, for instance, the concerns of rural poor women are often “lost in translation.” Poor information flows across different levels of government, contradictory policies, and a myriad other factors can block the path from policy decision to practice, nullifying investment of time and resources in the pursuit of influence – time and resources in short supply among poor rural people.

In short, rural citizens – women more so than men, and those living in poverty more so than others – tend to have limited opportunities or capacity to influence policy processes taking place in capital cities (let alone beyond borders). Alas, decentralized governance is not per se “empowering.” In fact, decentralization can breed disempowerment due to insufficient “power” of local governments, élite capture, or contradictory policies. For instance, decentralization of implementation of land policies is not a guarantee that the rights of vulnerable rural people are taken into account. To the contrary, it is not unusual for land allocation by local elected officials to generate clientelism and corruption (as seen in some controversial recent land concessions to foreign investors).<sup>15</sup> Power inequalities at the local level are also cited in the literature as hindering the success of participatory approaches to NRM in the water sector. Such inequalities are often reflected also in rural organizations – where, for instance, the voices of rural women or those living in poverty often have little space. Yet, rural organizations are critical venues of collective action, which is an essential factor in many domains of empowerment around NRM and agriculture – including the four key areas of policy focus just listed.

### **3. Rural people’s organizations and their role in empowerment processes around policy**

Challenges around rural citizenship are not only about individuals but also the capacity of rural organizations to legitimately represent their constituencies. It is important to underline here the diversity of rural societies, even among “the rural poor.” Empowerment spaces in these societies may in fact be needed around different social divides – by gender, ethnicity, type of livelihood, degree of market integration, reliance on a given natural resource base, etc.

Many types of organizations exist in rural areas, in which poor women and men may be active or represented to varying degrees. These include rural producers’ (or farmers’) organizations, rural women’s organizations, organizations of indigenous peoples, microfinance organizations, and many others. They also include NRM organizations like forest management groups, water users’ associations, rangeland management associations, fishery or lake management groups, etc. Among these, farmers’ organizations are often better placed at least in principle to link local concerns to policy processes at the national level, and vice versa. NRM organizations in which poor rural people participate are typically local, although they may maintain various types of networks.

In the past few decades there has been a proliferation of rural organizations in developing countries, and a simultaneous trend towards the fragmentation and consolidation of rural producers’ groups in particular – often with poor links between national and grassroots organizations.<sup>16</sup> This has taken place in the context of a retreat of the state from direct involvement in the rural economy (somewhat corrected in many countries after the recent food price spikes), at times in parallel with democratization or decentralization. In many parts of Africa, while rural producers’ organizations played a minimal role during structural adjustment in the 1990s,<sup>17</sup> in more recent years there have

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<sup>15</sup> Basserie, V. (2012). “New Challenges for Land Policy Actors in West Africa” in *Land tenure: Innovating Together*. Special issue of Grain de Sel, Journal of Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural, No. 57, January-March 2012. Basserie’s finding is specifically related to Senegal, but similar findings are reported also from other countries and regions.

<sup>16</sup>G. Onumah, J. Davis, U. Kleih and F. Proctor (2007). “Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets: Changing Agricultural Marketing Systems and Innovative Responses by Producer Organizations”. Working paper 2 of the IFAP-ECART-IFAD Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets (ESFIM) Research Project

<sup>17</sup> Mercoiret, M.R. (2006). “Les organisations paysannes et les politiques agricoles,” *Afrique Contemporaine* No. 217

been many examples of their participation in policy processes concerning agriculture at the national and regional levels.<sup>18</sup> In Latin America, rural groups have been mobilizing on a broad agenda including land issues, trade, the legal status of family farming, indigenous peoples' entitlements, democratization, and accountability. In South Asia, rural self-help groups, tribal peoples' groups, and farmers' associations have grown in number and mobilized on issues of land access, forest and fishery management, and markets. In parts of East Asia (including China, spurred by a new law on cooperatives<sup>19</sup>) there has been a resurgence of rural cooperatives, and decentralization has enabled rural organizations to play a greater role in governance in some countries.

In some areas, for instance the MERCOSUR, Central America and West Africa, the emergence of regional inter-governmental efforts to tackle agricultural and food policy issues has stimulated regional networking among farmers' organizations. Some rural movements are also very active in international advocacy. Yet, only a small percentage of farmers in developing countries are part of producers' associations or other formal organizations. Most are part of loose and informal networks that operate in synergy only at specific points in time. Women are generally under-represented in formal rural producers' organizations, especially in their top layers.<sup>20</sup> Depending on context, rural women may instead be very active in self-help and informal micro-credit groups. In some areas, they also have significant roles in NRM institutions like forest or water management groups.

Several authors see the growth of rural organizations as a necessary part of progress towards better governance in NRM and agriculture and more generally in rural areas. Some argue for example that rural producers' organizations can build the confidence of rural populations, encourage learning and new collective capacities, and contribute to building more democratic societies.<sup>21</sup> The US Overseas Cooperative Development Council has argued that cooperatives contribute to "transformational development" by increasing incomes, stimulating growth, giving people a chance to learn firsthand how to engage in democratic governance, and increasing social trust and solidarity.<sup>22</sup> When it comes to participation in policy processes, rural organizations (at times supported by NGOs) often play a critical role in channeling information to the grassroots, facilitating debate, and aggregating voices – a role of which policymakers are well aware and on which in several contexts they rely. Yet, rural organizations are extremely diverse in form and functioning, and provide different degrees of voice to those among their members who live in poverty. Also, in order to provide concrete empowerment opportunities to their members, these organizations need enabling policies (e.g. concerning markets, prices, trade, etc.) and well functioning public institutions.

As for rural people's organizations concerned with NRM, there is evidence that they can play important roles in local governance and NRM, especially if they are recognized as legitimate partners by state institutions, have sufficient resources, and work democratically. These conditions are not often in place, however. For instance, local organizations managing biodiversity-rich ecosystems can have positive impact on both environmental conservation and livelihoods, but many suffer from insufficient devolution of authority and poor integration into national conservation programs.<sup>23</sup> In general, community-level organizations for NRM must operate alongside a range of other effective and accountable institutions in order to generate actual empowerment opportunities. For instance,

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<sup>18</sup> *La participation des organisations paysannes dans les processus d'élaboration et de négociation des politiques agricoles et commerciales en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Bureau Issala, Jade production, Lares, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Huang, J. Wang, X. Qui, H. (2012) *Small-scale farmers in China in the face of modernisation and globalisation*. London/The Hague: IIED/HIVOS

<sup>20</sup> In the case of Africa, see for instance *Women's collective action. Unlocking the potential of agricultural markets*. An Oxfam International research report. Oxford: Oxfam International, 2013

<sup>21</sup> Mercoiret, M. R. and J. Minla Mfou'ou (2006). "Rural Producer Organizations (RPOs), empowerment of farmers and results of collective action." Introductory note for "Rural Producers Organizations for Pro-poor Sustainable Agricultural Development," a workshop held in preparation for the WDR 2008, Paris 30-31 October 2006, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Cooperatives. Pathways to economic, democratic and social development in the global economy*. USOCD, 2007. The report provides a number of examples of how rural cooperatives can strengthen resilience, social capital, and governance.

<sup>23</sup> Swiderska, K. with D. Roe, L. Siegele, M. Grieg-Gran. (2008) *The Governance of Nature and the Nature of Governance: Policy that works for biodiversity and livelihoods*. London: IIED

the literature about devolution of responsibilities for water or rangeland management shows that neither well-functioning local organizations nor good policies alone are sufficient for empowering impact. Also, some studies of policy and legal processes around recent large land acquisitions show that these run a higher risk of being disempowering for poor rural people in the absence of *both* an effective and accountable state and an active citizenry.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. Policies supporting empowerment opportunities as “work in progress”

**Good policy practice can occur in any area where poor rural people face challenges** or are held back from capturing opportunities by existing power relations. **In terms of content, an important set of policies are those that strengthen poor rural people’s entitlements and capabilities as users of productive natural resources.** And in this context, policies that enhance secure access and tenure over land and related resources for groups living below or just above the poverty line – women in particular – are, among others, a key area of concern today. **In terms of process, good practice involves genuinely participatory and democratic policy-making processes, and policy outcomes that stipulate continued recognition of poor people’s right to be part of governance.** Finally, for empowerment opportunities to materialize, both policies and policy processes should be **accompanied by measures to support the ability of marginalized groups to use their right to participation.** In this context, support to inclusive rural organizations, access to information, and affirmative action measures for marginalized groups, are all very important.

Given the interconnected nature of challenges and power inequalities weighing upon poor rural people, **“empowering” processes are likely to span several domains, with different policies complementing each other.** In general, linkages are needed in particular between:

- policy domains that have to do with securing poor rural people’s rights over natural resources (e.g. policies on governance of land, water, forests, rangelands, fisheries)
- those that have to do with services and public and private activities that can generate assets that poor rural people need to improve their livelihoods (R&D, extension services, finance, education, infrastructure, energy, ICTs)
- those that have to do with accessibility, stability, and the functioning of markets that are important for poor rural people (e.g. policies regarding agricultural trade, prices, market stabilization instruments, producers’ organizations, contracts, investment, labor).

**Linkages are often needed to policy areas not directly related to NRM and agriculture.** For instance, policies that promote women’s equal access to land rights or joint titling of land (as they exist, for instance, in Ethiopia, Tanzania, The Philippines, etc.) are a key part of an agenda of support to rural poor people’s empowerment, but typically require complementary action in family law, finance, market access, and education.<sup>25</sup> In turn, policies that promote women’s land rights can be part of a broader gender equality agenda. For instance, the recent Guatemala agriculture policy, which has specific gender equality provisions, complements other cross-sectoral gender policies.

**Social protection policies can also complement NRM and agriculture policies in empowering ways.** For instance, through India’s Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, launched in 2006, public work opportunities are guaranteed for adults in rural households – with a focus on women - for up to 100 days a year. Activities are concentrated in restoring the natural resource base and building rural infrastructure and assets to enable better NRM and rural development. Studies speak of 12 billion person-days of work created by the program in rural areas, resulting in the construction of irrigation canals, water harvesting and conservation systems, land development, and

<sup>24</sup> Some speak in this regard of the simultaneous need for accountability as rights (which is about state institutions and policies) and accountability as power (which is about citizens mobilizing around their entitlements). See Polack, E., Cotula, L. and Côte, M. (2013) *Accountability in Africa’s land rush: what role for legal empowerment?* IIED/IDRC, London/Ottawa.

<sup>25</sup> Hallward-Driemeier, M. and T. Hasan (2012). *Empowering women : legal rights and economic opportunities in Africa.* Washington, DC: World Bank and AFD



improved groundwater levels. At the household level, the program has strengthened livelihood strategies and improved nutritional status – both major factors underpinning empowerment.<sup>26</sup>

**Historically, policies promoting inclusive access to land for smallholder farmers have been a key source of opportunities for empowerment.** As noted, this is a domain where significant gaps often exist between policy and practice. For instance, large-scale land deals involving foreign actors have been authorized in some countries with legislation strongly supportive of local land rights, including customary rights (recognized by law for instance in Niger, Mali, Mozambique, Tanzania, and other countries). Historical exceptions to weak policy implementation in this domain exist, however – e.g. land reforms in China and Viet Nam during the 1980s, with complementary policies to support the smallholder sector and strengthen smallholder farmers' economic capabilities. These opened up empowerment opportunities for poor farmers around productivity growth, market access, improvement of quality of life, and so forth. Also in China, recent reforms facilitating farmers' access to land rental markets have had similar effects by reducing risks associated with people's choice to pursue off-farm opportunities or to stay in agriculture and take on more land to farm.<sup>27</sup>

**Many recent initiatives for inclusive governance of NRM have created empowerment opportunities, but these need to stand the test of new pressures in the agriculture sector.** Several governments have recently undertaken policy reforms in the area of access to land, management of fisheries, water, forests, or rangelands. Some of these have sought specifically to develop the smallholder and family farming sector, or to strengthen poor rural communities. Observers see for instance some land policies developed in African countries in the 1990s-2000s as creating a favorable environment for the recognition and actualization of the rights of poor rural people. In the area of forestry, one can recall from the same period India's 2006 Recognition of Forests Rights Act, which recognizes inheritable forests rights in areas inhabited by scheduled tribes and entrusts forest rights holders and village institutions with biodiversity conservation duties.<sup>28</sup> Many innovations in the area of participatory NRM also emerged in the past couple of decades with, at least on paper, potential empowering effects on poor rural households and communities. However, with new investment flows and continuing demographic pressure, coupled with real or perceived trade-offs between livelihoods and environmental objectives in some areas (e.g. forestry), it cannot be taken for granted that even such "good policies" will have empowering effects in the coming years.<sup>29</sup>

**Processes orienting agricultural policy can offer empowerment opportunities if they are genuinely participatory, with strong mechanisms for engaging smallholder farmers.** One example concerns the 2006 *Loi d'Orientation Agricole* (LOA) in Mali, designed to respond to endemic poverty and food insecurity but also natural resource degradation, climatic hazards, and market access challenges facing small farmers. In 2004, the government tasked the *Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes* (CNOP) with facilitating broad-based inclusion of rural groups in developing the LOA. The CNOP relied on a specialized NGO to reach down to rural communities and achieve a synthesis position based on their inputs. The *concertation* (or consultative process) was launched in February 2005 and unfolded over different stages. Issues put forward by rural communities and small farmers, e.g. concerning food sovereignty and more equitable and sustainable land governance and NRM, were taken on board by policymakers. In spite of this, public decisions in Mali in the past couple of years have tended to privilege large-scale land investments over modernization of smallholder and family agriculture.<sup>30</sup> Yet, the LOA and the institutions developed around its implementation provide tools that rural groups can use for dialogue with government around such decisions.

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<sup>26</sup> 2012 *Global food policy report*. Washington, DC: IFPRI, 2013

<sup>27</sup> Huang, J., Wang, X. Qiu, H. (2012) *Small-scale farmers in China in the face of modernisation and globalisation*, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> K. Swiderska, with D. Roe, L. Siegele, M. Grieg-Gran. (2008) *The Governance of Nature and the Nature of Governance: Policy that works for biodiversity and livelihoods*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> *Land tenure: Innovating Together*. Grain de Sel, Journal of Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural, No. 57, Jan.-March 2012

<sup>30</sup> B. Vorley, L. Cotula and Man-Kwun Chan (2012). *Tipping the balance. Policies to shape agricultural investments and markets in favour of small-scale farmers*. London: IIED and Oxfam

**Empowerment opportunities for poor rural people can also emerge around participatory land policy development.** One example concerns Burkina Faso, where development of a new land policy in the 2000s was linked to a process of decentralization that included the creation of *communes rurales* responsible for NRM. As in Mali, top-level political commitment was a key factor behind the participatory approach to policy design, as the government saw land tenure as touching upon issues of democracy, equity, peace, and justice.<sup>31</sup> The chief mechanism to enable a consultative process was an inter-ministerial platform with civil society participation named *Comité National pour la Sécurisation Foncière au Milieu Rural*. In 2003, the platform began pilot operations to improve security of tenure and developing a methodology for a National Policy.<sup>32</sup> There followed a nationwide effort to involve as many stakeholder groups as possible. The Land Coalition referred to this as “a process that has engaged farmers, pastoralists, communities, government and the private sector at local, regional and national levels to formulate their own visions of land tenure and land access as a basis for their land policy.”<sup>33</sup> The process was based on the principle that all stakeholders should participate equally. The participation of farmers, traditional rural leaders, and rural women was particularly sought and accompanied by affirmative action measures to ensure their engagement.<sup>34</sup> As in the Mali case, the consultation process was planned with ample time and with a broad set of initiatives. This was essential to give rural constituencies and those facilitating their participation the opportunity to learn in depth about the issues, discuss, and develop a consensus.<sup>35</sup>

**Policy implementation can be “empowering” if it stipulates a continuation of participatory decision-making around NRM governance.** For instance, in Mali the LOA stipulated the involvement of farmers’ organizations in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public policies and programmes, e.g. through co-management of consultative institutions named *Chambres d’Agriculture*.<sup>36</sup> In Burkina, the land policy process included the involvement of rural communities in discussing and piloting context-specific solutions to local land tenure and NRM issues. This is of particular interest today, as many challenges of sustainable productivity growth and climate adaptation in agriculture are context specific and require local solutions, which may provide empowerment opportunities for local actors. After the Policy was adopted in May 2007, the process continued with consultative meetings on the definition of a land law (adopted in 2009) and of an implementation plan.<sup>37</sup> Hence, opportunities for empowerment continued. Also, the Policy also had as one of its “orientations” the development of legitimate local institutions to manage land issues.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See the full text of the Policy at <http://www.hubrural.org/IMG/pdf/PNSFMR.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> A detailed analysis of the establishment and role of the CNSFMR is in V. Basseurie and M. Traore Derme (2007). *Pour une politique pragmatique et consensuelle de securisation foncière en milieu rural*. Ministère de l’Agriculture, de l’Hydraulique et des Ressources Halieutiques, Direction Générale du Foncier Rural et des Organisations Paysannes.

<sup>33</sup> “Submission of the International Land Coalition for the Secretary General’s Report for CSD-17 on the Thematic Issue of Land” at [http://www.landcoalition.org/pdf/08\\_10\\_ILC\\_submission\\_SGReport\\_CSD17.pdf](http://www.landcoalition.org/pdf/08_10_ILC_submission_SGReport_CSD17.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> H. Ouedraogo (2006). “The land policy process in Burkina Faso: Building a National Consensus”, in *Land Rights for African Development: From Knowledge to Action*, CAPRI – CGIAR.

<sup>35</sup> This was the case particularly for farmers’ organizations and traditional rural leaders, according to D. Thiéba, who conducted a study of the elaboration of the National Policy (discussed in S. Ouattara (2008). “La politique foncière au Burkina Faso: une élaboration participative ?” *Grain de Sel* No. 41.42).

<sup>36</sup> See the brief presentation of the LOA at [http://www.hubrural.org/pdf/redev\\_note\\_contenu\\_loa\\_mali.pdf](http://www.hubrural.org/pdf/redev_note_contenu_loa_mali.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> See the “Rapport de Synthèse des travaux de l’atelier de validation de l’avant projet de loi portant sécurisation foncière en milieu rural” published by the Ministère de l’Agriculture, de l’Hydraulique et des Ressources Halieutiques of Burkina Faso in November 2008.

<sup>38</sup> The objectives of this policy are to guarantee legitimate access rights to land resources to all rural actors in a perspective of sustainable rural development, overcoming poverty, and promoting equity; contributing to preventing or regulating conflicts linked to tenure issues or to natural resource management; contributing to creating the foundations for the viability and development of territorial communities by endowing them with effective land tenure and land management tools; strengthening the efficacy of state services in terms of public service delivery well adapted to securing land tenure; and promoting the effective participation of grassroots civil society stakeholders in implementing and monitoring the Policy. Its general principles include encouraging investment in rural areas, taking into consideration different needs and concerns especially pertaining to vulnerable groups, environmental conservation and sustainability, good governance, and pursuit of equity, justice, and social peace. (Paraphrased from French from M. Traore, op. cit.)

This included participative planning and management at the level of communities and *collectivités territoriales*, and encouraging village communities to develop land tenure management rules (in line with general laws) in a participative manner.

**Even policies judged problematic by rural constituencies can prompt their mobilization around implementation, which may create empowerment opportunities.** In The Philippines, for instance, the 1990s saw much progress in implementing the 1988 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Policy (CARP) thanks to a convergence of state action with active rural citizenship.<sup>39</sup> While many farmers' organizations were dissatisfied with the CARP,<sup>40</sup> several adopted a dual strategy of protest and collaboration with the state around CARP implementation. They did this in order to benefit from the opportunities that the CARP created, while striving to keep the political debate open. Collaboration took place for instance around the Agrarian Reform Community program, an integrated development program in areas covered by the reform, aiming to make them economically viable by providing farmers with training, agricultural services, infrastructure, finance, etc. In a different context, the evolution of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) in Brazil in the 1990s-2000s has involved a struggle for agrarian transformation "based on a well-developed discourse around rural rights and citizenship"<sup>41</sup> that also in part revolved around implementation of a "less than perfect" agrarian policy. In particular, the implementation of the 1985 National Plan for Land Reform, followed by the 1988 Constitution, formed an important part of the policy context for the MST strategy.<sup>42</sup> This included relatively autonomous forms of "agrarian citizenship" in reform settlements, civil protest and land occupations, and engagement in juridical debates around policy implementation. The latter influenced political discourses and legal interpretations of agrarian policy, with implications that were in several cases empowering for poor landless Brazilians.

**Some new empowerment opportunities are emerging around multi-stakeholder consultations around national plans for climate adaptation or ecosystem services.** Studies generally document insufficient involvement of rural constituencies in the design of programs in these and other similar areas. There are, however, also some promising practices. For instance, a WRI study on national frameworks for implementation of REDD+ looks at Brazil, where a multi-stakeholder committee has been set up to consult with social movements, small rural landowners, rural producers and foresters, to identify safeguards later incorporated into state-level legislation.<sup>43</sup> These included recognition and respect of local rights to lands, territories, and natural resources; fair, transparent, and equitable benefit sharing; improvement in quality of life and poverty alleviation; participatory decision-making and implementation. All these, if applied, could support empowerment processes around REDD+. Similar processes in Indonesia and Mexico yielded safeguard proposals with even stronger empowerment implications – such as gender equity, empowering indigenous knowledge and rights, and free prior and informed consent of indigenous and rural communities affected by REDD+ programs. A focus on improving local governance and targeting vulnerable rural communities also appears in some national strategies in this domain. For instance, in Mexico forest management policies have been amended after the 2012 General Law on Climate Change, to integrate safeguards and capacity building provisions for poor rural communities.

**Policies beyond the national level can create empowerment tools for rural communities and organizations at the country level.** The reference to free prior and informed consent of indigenous

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<sup>39</sup> Borras, S. and J. Franco (2007), "The National Campaign for Land Reform in The Philippines," at <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/Part/proj/pnp.html>

<sup>40</sup> J. Franco (2001). *Elections and Democratization in the Philippines*, New York: Routledge

<sup>41</sup> H. Wittman (2008). "Reframing agrarian citizenship: Land, life and power in Brazil." *Journal of Rural Studies*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Agrarian reform in Brazil is also based on other policy documents regulating implementation issued in later years.

<sup>43</sup> Daviet, F. and G. Larsen. (2012) *Safeguarding forests and people. A framework for designing a national system to implement REDD+ safeguards*. Washington, DC: WRI. A number of safeguards for REDD+ programmes were already agreed at the 2010 UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) in Cancun, and they include transparency, participation, protection of biodiversity, and protection of the rights of local people. However, specific national safeguards can be established at national level to ensure that REDD+ initiatives benefit both the environment and rural livelihoods.

and rural communities in some of these initiatives highlights an important point - namely that principles affirmed by policy in a given context (e.g. an international document like the International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) can be used by rural constituencies to advance their claims or advocate for policy reforms in other contexts. At the regional level, this has been the case for instance of the 2005 Agricultural Policy of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), which resulted from a process including the Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organisations of West Africa (ROPPA). The policy included inputs from farmers' organizations and provisions to support the smallholder and family agriculture sector. After 2005, farmers' organizations had to stay engaged to ensure follow up on policy implementation.<sup>44</sup> However, the policy itself has been an empowering tool, as it has enabled them to put pressure on governments based on commitments made at the sub-regional and continental levels. A similar process may take place around the country level adoption of elements of the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (adopted by the Committee on World Food Security, or CFS, in May 2012). These resulted from a massive multi-stakeholder consultation at the international and regional levels, involving farmers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, rural women, and forest users. Rural poor people had opportunities to engage throughout the process, and the civil society mechanism at the CFS had time and resources to reach out to diverse voices— creating a capacity to engage that proved valuable in later discussions (e.g. on responsible agricultural investment principles). The document reflects best practice in policy and governance related to land, fisheries, and forests, which can also have empowering impact as they promote the rights of primary resource users, including smallholder and family farmers, indigenous peoples, and rural women.

**Empowerment opportunities and challenges make implementation of even of “good policies” always “work in progress.”** Both the ECOWAS policy and the Voluntary Guidelines cases highlight how efforts to use policy as a tool for empowerment are typically work in progress. Indeed, even when progressive policies are designed and provisions for implementation are in place, the job from an empowerment perspective is far from done. At a minimum, poor rural people need to be fully informed about policies and their implications, and able to use their provisions to claim or protect their entitlements. As noted, rural organizations can play a key role in this regard. Also, legal empowerment activities can have important impact on poor NRM actors (particularly rural women, who typically have less recourse to the legal system than do men).<sup>45</sup> Poor rural people may also need support in mapping, demarcation, and drawing up of legal documents to certify their NRM entitlements or to claim compensation when encroachment or dispossession occur. These processes as well can support empowerment if they occur in inclusive ways and foster local capacity to protect rights. The same can be said virtually of any initiative that takes place as a spinoff of a policy – from land use zoning to a public procurement contract. At any point in these processes, power relations can shape outcomes in ways unfavorable to poor rural people or to specific groups. In this sense as well, policy implementation is always “work in progress” from an empowerment perspective.

**Responsive, accountable, and capable institutions for policy implementation can make a major difference for empowerment.** For instance, provisions concerning environmental and social impact assessments before authorizing large-scale land transactions may be so vague as to allow discretionary application and facilitate corruption, if implementing institutions are not accountable to vulnerable rural constituencies. And policies may require strengthening or developing institutions that can support new ways of managing natural resources or administering rural services, new incentives to promote compliance, and so forth. When institutional arrangements for policy implementation directly involve local actors, empowerment opportunities may depend on clear devolution of powers, capacity building, partnerships between state and non-state institutions, and

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<sup>44</sup> *La participation des organisations paysannes dans les processus d'élaboration et de négociation des politiques agricoles et commerciales en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Bureau Issala, Jade production, Lares, 2011

<sup>45</sup> Hallward-Driemeier, M. and T. Hasan (2012). *Empowering women : legal rights and economic opportunities in Africa*, op. cit., R. Nielsen (2012). *Sustaining legal empowerment in initiatives to support local land rights*. London: IIED

affirmative action measures for marginalized groups. These were for instance key success factors for participatory lake management institutions in Uganda in the 2000s. Other examples can be found in local land administration committees with quotas for women (as it occurs for instance in Tanzania, The Philippines, Rwanda), combined with capacity building measures for them to fully participate in decision-making. It is important to stress, however, that for most policies related to NRM and agriculture the empowerment of local institutions and local actors cannot be seen in isolation from institutional development at higher levels. An obvious illustration of this comes from the management of river basins, where weak coordination among institutions at different levels can have disempowering impact locally, or from incentive tools to promote policy compliance on NRM through payment for environmental service schemes in watershed or river basin areas.

**In some cases, devolving to rural constituencies the administration of public resources to implement policy in the NRM and agriculture sector can create empowerment opportunities.** An illustration of this comes from Peru. In 2002, two key decentralization laws were approved, and regional and municipal governments elected with new powers.<sup>46</sup> This helped create new opportunities for rural people's empowerment in areas like the Puno-Cusco *Corredor* in the Peruvian *Sierra*, an area with high incidence of poverty and a prevalence of indigenous Quechua and Aymara inhabitants.<sup>47</sup> Citizenship challenges faced by communities in this area were related to lack of identity cards (especially among women), illiteracy, language barriers, and remoteness from decision-making centers. On the positive side, communities had good collective action capabilities in NRM and other aspects of social life.<sup>48</sup> An important policy innovation supporting both decentralization and empowerment was the establishment of competitive mechanisms for transparent allocation and mobilization of resources to fund local development – the Local Resource Allocation Committees. This initially took place through contests to channel resources from an IFAD-supported project to participating municipalities or groups, and then extended to other municipalities. Through the LRAC, communities (and women and men alike) became responsible for managing public budgets for NRM, agriculture, and micro and small enterprise development. The results included more transparent governance and stronger social and human capital.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the LRAC enhanced the capacity of marginalized different rural groups to negotiate with government about their respective visions and priorities for local development around NRM.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusions - some take home points

- New challenges and opportunities in NRM and agriculture require policy responses, to ensure that poor rural people develop the needed capabilities to participate and fully benefit from changes in these sectors. In most cases, this cannot take place without policy and governance processes that support rural citizenship – including marginalized constituencies like rural women, indigenous peoples, and all those living in poverty.
- Securing rural poor people's entitlements over productive resources, and supporting smallholder and family agriculture to face new environmental and market issues in NRM and agriculture, are two key areas for policy attention to create opportunities for empowerment. The specific agenda to pursue is, however, context- and time-specific – there is no recipe for a “pro-empowerment” policy solution to issues emerging in these areas.
- There are now many policies tackling these issues and designed or implemented with rural people's engagement. Despite good practices, however, there is often “a major gap between

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<sup>46</sup> IFAD, *Proyecto de Desarrollo Corredor Puno-Cusco. Informe Final*. Rome, December 2008.

<sup>47</sup> IFAD, *Peru COSOP*, April 2009; and O. Damiani, “Rural Development from a Territorial Perspective. Case Studies in Asia and Latin America.” Background Paper for the WDR 2008, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> IFAD, *Republic of Peru: Innovative Experiences in IFAD Projects in Peru. Thematic Study*. At [http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public\\_html/eksyst/doc/agreement/pl/pe\\_theme.htm](http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/agreement/pl/pe_theme.htm)

<sup>49</sup> IFAD, *Republic of Peru: Development of the Puno-Cusco Corridor Project, Interim Evaluation*. Rome, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> IFAD, *Proyecto de Desarrollo Corredor Puno-Cusco. Informe Final*. Op. cit., p. 30.

good policy intentions and what is happening on the ground. Effective policy requires not only well thought out policy design, but also sustained investment in implementation. This includes capacity strengthening of government agencies and regulators and among the groups that would stand to gain from proper implementation (...).<sup>51</sup>

- From an empowerment perspective, it is important to consider that opportunities may emerge at all stages of policy processes and of governance based on such policies. They may emerge in policy design, but can be created also – and often with more important impact - around implementation, both locally and linked to national (or even regional) processes.
- Both at policy design and at implementation stage, rural people’s organizations have critical roles to play to enable collective action and rural citizenship. Policies should facilitate these roles by supporting rural organizations and creating spaces for them in the governance of NRM and agriculture. There are, as noted, issues to solve around the effectiveness and inclusiveness of many rural organizations. Policy processes can also encourage positive change on both fronts – e.g. by setting high standards for inclusion of rural women’s voices when farmers’ organizations are asked to facilitate consultations around a given policy.<sup>52</sup>
- It is important to restate that empowerment processes can be affected by many factors, among which the policy environment is typically only one element. Keeping this in mind is important not to form excessive expectations around “empowering” policies.
- The emergence of formal markets and of formal opportunities for participation in policy and governance is an important aspect recent changes in the rural sectors from an empowerment perspective. There is also, however, continued and perhaps growing informality in markets and institutions of concern to poor rural women and men. Policy initiatives need to help build the capabilities of rural poor women and men and strengthen spaces where they can define and pursue better lives in both contexts.

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<sup>51</sup> B. Vorley, L. Cotula and Man-Kwun Chan (2012). *Tipping the balance. Policies to shape agricultural investments and markets in favour of small-scale farmers*, op. cit., , p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> See *Women’s collective action. Unlocking the potential of agricultural markets*. An Oxfam International research report. Oxford: Oxfam International, 2013. In the countries studied in this report – Mali, Ethiopia, and Tanzania –where policies concerning associations have gender equality provisions, there is stronger correlation between women’s increased control over resources and decision-making and their participation in these organizations.