

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20523

PD-110Q-842  
LN 38115

August 31, 1976

ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: AA/TA, Dr. Erven Long  
THRU: TA/RES, Dr. Miloslav Rechcigl   
FROM: TA/RD, Charles S. Blankstein   
SUBJECT: Unsolicited Research Request -- Cornell University  
"The Poorest of the Poor Majority: The Landless"

Problem: The landless or near landless constitute a large and growing proportion of the world's rural poor: this Agency's special and proper concern. Yet our systematic knowledge of the landless is insufficient to formulate sound development policies that might address the varieties of their conditions and circumstances. Nor do we know to what extent some of our well intended current and past development policies, not sufficiently cognizant of the socio-economic reality of this special group, may have lessened or worsened their impoverishment. For example, it is suggested that most land distribution efforts have worsened, not bettered their lot, that most rural works programs have, at best, by-passed them in favor of small-holders, and that most rural welfare schemes treat them as invisibles.

Successful policies and programs that are concerned with integrating the landless into regional development programs so as to increase their productivity as rural wage laborers, as potential new-lands cultivators, as participants in cooperative rural industry, and other income producing activities are yet to be understood and applied by practitioners and development analysts. Too little thinking about integrated rural development, even that purporting to deal specifically with the rural poor, takes the landless fully into account. With the exception of a very few, such as laborers organized around a single cash crop (e.g. banana workers in Central America) or special populations selected for limited colonization efforts, have the rural landless been the subjects of special AID development programs. (Not that "special programs" for the landless are the expected answer to the inquiry here proposed).

Clearly, we need more systematic knowledge about the landless poor, who probably constitute between 25 and 40% of the total rural poor. How can they be effectively integrated into rural development programs in general? How might specific programs be developed to address their peculiar needs and problems?

Proposal: This modest research project is intended to search existing literature and to inventory ongoing research efforts addressed to this socio-economic phenomenon so as:

- to provide the beginnings of a discrete data base on the landless poor and an initial effort at an analytical statement setting forth the magnitudes, trends, characteristics, and geographic incidences of the problem,
- to identify, classify and evaluate the programs which have attempted to improve the lot of the landless as documented in the development literature and, based on this inquiry and analysis,
- to develop a series of indicative hypotheses with corresponding recommendations for more sharply defined action/research that could significantly further the formulation of development action policies for ameliorating the problems of "the landless poor" or for more effectively integrating them into general rural development efforts.

Summary:

Title: The Poorest of the Poor Majority: The Landless

Time: One Year beginning September 1976

Cost: \$34,714 (see attached proposal, page 9, for budget detail)

Investigators:

Principal investigator--Dr. Milton J. Esman, Director  
Center for International Studies  
Cornell University, Ithica, N.Y. 14853

Project Steering Committee--Members Cornell Rural Development Committee (faculty representing several appropriate disciplines).

Researchers--Four graduate students from selected disciplines under direct supervision of Dr. Esman and/or Committee Members.

Project Manager: Charles S. Blankstein, Director, TA/RD

Research Purpose and Expected Products

The purpose of this research is to provide AID with a clearer definition of the nature and extent of the "landless poor" problem, indicative hypotheses as to its causes and potential remedies, an indicative inventory of remedies that have been tried with an assessment of their relative success or failure, and some suggestive lines of research to further our understanding and possible approaches to the problem. Based on this modest initial effort, it is expected that more sharply focused action research in the form of country or region specific projects or case studies will follow.

The products of the research, detailed on pages 6 and 7 of the attached proposal, are to be presented in the form of a paper or papers for discussion in a workshop setting so that feedback from development scholars and practitioners is built into the project. The expectation is that concrete and immediately actionable outcomes will become known and made immediately useful to the community and the Agency.

As appropriate, the results will guide us into a second, more precise phase of an action research effort. This would be closely coordinated with a larger, more comprehensive initiative that PPC has proposed for FY 78 and could well form the basis of that or a similar undertaking.

Discussion: Although the research has been designed to be primarily a search of the literature to establish as fullsome a data base as possible on the landless and near landless poor, it also includes the identification and evaluation of any ongoing institutional or individual research efforts in this area (such as with ILO, or ESCAP), and travel to contact and work with the researchers. It also provides for travel to Washington for Cornell staff members for substantive consultations with RD and other AID staff and consultants who may, in the course of the project, have contributions to make to data collection/evaluation/analysis.

The project manager at Cornell is a highly respected authority on development, Dr. Milton Esman, whose time for this project is being contributed by the University. In addition, senior faculty who form part of the Rural Development Committee, representing a variety of disciplines, will also contribute their time as advisors to the

graduate students conducting the actual search and analysis of the literature and the ongoing research efforts. The final paper, presenting the outcomes of the research, will be prepared by or under the close supervision of Dr. Esman.

In order to facilitate the utilization of the results of this project, a workshop to discuss the final paper has been built into the project. As may be most appropriate, the workshop will be held either at Cornell or in AID/W and will include both practitioners and development planners/policy makers as well as interested scholars. Notes and or tapes of the workshop will be made to help form the basis of concrete feedback to the research project and for guidance to AID in utilizing the project results for future action.

An initial draft of the research proposal was circulated to appropriate AID offices. Most responded favorably with some suggestions for making the products of the effort more precise and more actionable for the Agency. These suggestions were relayed to Cornell and in most instances were incorporated into the final proposal attached to this memorandum.

Since the research project is planned to coincide with the beginning of the Fall semester at Cornell, the assignment of especially qualified graduate students to work on it for a full year, and the special fiscal considerations of our transitional quarter, the timing of your decision on this project is critical.

Recommendation: That you approve the research proposal on landless poor.

Approved: Eileen J. Long

Disapproved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: Sept. 3, 1976

Attachment: a/s

Clearances:

TA/PPU, Carl Fritz Cyf 2/1/76

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# Center for International Studies

Office of the Director

THE POOREST OF THE POOR MAJORITY:  
THE LANDLESS

Amount of Project

\$34,714

  
Milton J. Esman  
Principle Investigator

  
Director  
Academic Funding

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Title: The Poorest of the Poor Majority: the Landless

Problem: In many Third World countries, the landless are the fastest growing component of rural society. (By landless we refer to those who have no claim whatever to the land either as owner-cultivators or as tenants but must rely entirely on their labor for subsistence.) Though statistics are unreliable and tend to be understated by governments, the landless now comprise between 25 and 40 percent of the rural labor force in many areas (e.g. Java, Bangladesh, Morocco, El Salvador, Ecuador, Egypt, Kerala, Andhra) and their numbers are increasing rapidly with population growth, the fragmentation of small holdings, and the tendency of owners to substitute laborers for tenants. In addition, there is a large category of marginal cultivators or "near landless," families whose holdings or tenancies are too tiny to provide subsistence and whose men, women and children must therefore enter the rural labor market in order to survive.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Illustrative of the scope of landlessness and near landlessness is a recent study of El Salvador using 1971 data. It found that 24 percent of rural families have no access to land, while an additional 37 percent cultivate less than a hectare. Families without access to land had incomes 32 percent below the government's own estimate of minimum subsistence needs and were unemployed 65 percent of the time available for work. (Enrique Garcia Ayaviri, "Rural Income and Employment," USAID San Salvador, October 29, 1974, unpublished.) Princeton Lyman in 1971, using 1963-64 data, estimated that in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) 42 percent of rural families were at the level of "practical landlessness." During the intervening 12 years population has been growing at the compound annual rate of 3 percent, indicating that this group now is probably a majority of rural families in Bangladesh. "Issues in Rural Development in East Pakistan," Journal of Comparative Administration, May 1971.

The landless and near landless are not a homogeneous group. The minority who have permanent jobs on plantations, working for landlords, or in non-farm activities are relatively well-off in that their subsistence requirements are met. The great majority, however, suffer from all the symptoms of abject poverty and frequently of destitution,--underemployment, low wages, malnutrition, substandard housing, high incidence of disease and illiteracy, and rapid population growth. They are seldom organized into unions or protected by minimum wages and because of their desperate poverty and dependency, they are easy targets for exploitation. They are last in line for scarce public services; even governments which attempt to extend services to the landless have difficulty reaching them, since women and children must also work when work can be found and many of them must migrate in search of seasonal employment.

Given present rates of population growth in the rural areas of developing countries and the inability of urban areas to absorb more than a small fraction of the rural population increase in productive employment, the ranks of the landless are certain to swell during the next twenty-five years. Their numbers will be augmented by the offsprings of small holders and tenants for whom no land will be available. Similarly the numbers of near landless will increase greatly with the further fragmentation of small holdings. In many areas the landless and near landless will constitute a substantial majority of rural people before the end of the century. Though the

situation varies greatly from country to country and among regions in the same country, we are clearly witnessing a worldwide phenomenon of immiseration of staggering proportions.

Most governments and foreign assistance agencies, including A.I.D., prefer to conceive the rural poor as small holders or as tenant farmers and to orient rural development programs to that constituency. Small holders, too, are poor and in need of assistance and there are well tested packages of services and inputs, often including peasant organization and even land reform measures, which can be deployed on behalf of small owner cultivators and tenants. There has been a tendency, however, to neglect the plight of the landless and the near landless, because governments are not certain what measures to take on their behalf, because they are intimidated by the costs of providing services required to make a difference, and because they fear that the diversion of significant scarce resources and attention to the landless will have to be at the expense of other groups, urban and rural, who are more articulate and whose support is more important to the regime. Some governments have attempted to alleviate the conditions of the landless by such measures as land distribution (which usually helps tenants more than the landless), the opening of unused land for settlement, intensifying agricultural production through irrigation, multiple cropping, inter-cropping and other activities that absorb additional labor per unit of land, rural public works programs financed partly by PL480 food shipments, and fostering small industry in rural areas. A few countries, most conspicuously the

present regime in China, have turned to collective cultivation and encouraged rural collectives to establish local industries in order to provide employment for all members of the rural labor force.

The literature on the landless and near landless in developing countries is limited, scattered, and uneven in quality. Bits of information and analysis are available in country and regional studies focussing on rural poverty. Because they are of variable quality and reliability, they are not adequate for comparative analysis.<sup>2</sup> While some of the literature recognizes the growing problem of landlessness and treats it with compassion, it provides a scanty knowledge base for the definition, identification, location, and measurement of the phenomena of landlessness and near landlessness, on how the rural poor cope with their struggle for survival, on the remedial and ameliorative measures available to and attempted by governments, and on the consequences of these measures. The growing concern for the plight of the landless is not matched by a body of reliable information needed to provide a basis for systematic and comparative analysis. For a problem of such scope and such human and political consequences, the supporting knowledge base is extraordinarily thin. Except for a program

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<sup>2</sup>Two recent book length studies of rural poverty which include attention to the landless and near landless are Charles Elliot, Patterns of Poverty in the Third World, New York: Praeger, 1975 and Keith B. Griffin, Land Concentration and Rural Poverty, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976. The International Labor Review occasionally includes articles on this subject.

recently initiated by the ILO World Employment Program, a study for the Asian region by ESCAP in Bangkok, and the work of Professor Januzzi at the University of Texas on Bangladesh, I am not aware of any on-going systematic attempt to investigate this problem.

Proposal and Scope of Work: The Rural Development Committee of Cornell's Center for International Studies, in conjunction with its International Agriculture Program, International Population Program, and International Nutrition Program, will initiate a program of data collection and analysis in order to lay the foundation for a systematic and comparative body of knowledge focussed on the phenomena of landlessness and near landlessness in the rural areas of developing countries. This will involve the systematic combing of available literature--government and international agency publications, journal articles, monographs, books, A.I.D. project and country data--in order to develop a data base for the identification and measurement of landlessness and near landlessness, the means by which the rural poor sustain themselves and protect their individual and group interests, policy and program measures attempted by governments to alleviate the symptoms and deal more fundamentally with the problems of landlessness, and the consequences of these measures.

Data will be filed on a country and, where possible on a regional basis according to a common framework of classifiers which

will be designed before the data gathering begins. The country data will be cross-coded by topic to facilitate comparative analysis. We expect that the bulk of our effort during the first year, for which we are requesting support, will be devoted to the accumulation of data from available literature and from contacts which we shall initiate with ILO, ESCAP and other centers outside the U.S. which are doing work on this subject.

Simultaneously with gathering the data, we shall begin the process of analysis. The purpose of this analysis will be to familiarize ourselves with the manifestations of landlessness, to identify problems, patterns, and approaches to dealing with them on a cross-national basis, and to arrive at a typology which will enable us (for stage 2 of this program for which we are not now requesting support) to investigate in depth the problems and dimensions of landlessness in a limited sample of countries or areas which represent the types we shall have identified in our initial research. It is possible, though certainly not a requirement for this research, that the second phase of this program could be associated with an A.I.D. Spring Review focussed on the problems of landless workers.

The products of the first year of this research will be:

1. A data set on the phenomena of landlessness and near landlessness in less developed countries, organized by a common set of classifiers and drawn from available literature and research in progress by others (ILO, ESCAP).

2. An analytical paper which will include:
  - a. a more precise definition of the target group and attempts to measure the dimensions and incidence of landlessness by country and area.
  - b. alternative hypotheses on trends relating to the incidence of landlessness and near landlessness and on factors influencing these trends in different areas, including mechanization, agrarian reform, rural-urban migration, land settlement programs, fertility rates, etc.
  - c. identification and classification of measures employed by governments to cope with landlessness, and an initial assessment of the consequences and effectiveness of these measures.

Drawing on this information, the paper will then identify current gaps in knowledge about the phenomena of landlessness and near landlessness, elaborate a research strategy for reducing these gaps, including a specific research program for phase 2 of this project (which at present we believe will involve intensive investigations of these phenomena in a limited number of countries representing types identified in this first phase of the research), and suggest some policy and action measures available to less developed country governments and development assistance agencies for alleviating the consequences and reducing the incidence of landlessness.

3. A workshop at Cornell (or A.I.D., Washington) convening knowledgeable scholars and practitioners from the U.S. and overseas to review the state of knowledge and of on-going research on this subject, to discuss policy and program measures to cope with the problem, and to suggest further directions for research. The analytical paper will be the point of departure for the workshop discussions.

Organization and Resources Required:

1. The principal investigator will be Milton J. Esman, Professor of Government and Director of the Center for International Studies. His services will represent a contribution by Cornell University.

2. A steering committee will be constituted from among the members of the Rural Development Committee (attached). They will be selected to achieve a balance among disciplines relevant to the problem, knowledge of the major world areas, and familiarity with relevant data and methodologies. Their services will be contributed.

3. Four advanced graduate students will be appointed to conduct the research and data gathering required by the project. These will be students from several disciplines concerned with rural development. They will work under the direction of Professor Esman. We estimate that 2,400 man hours of research

(15 per researcher per week for 40 weeks or 15 x 4 x 40) should suffice to accomplish this research at \$4.00 per hour, which is standard for graduate student research. ... \$ 9,600

4. One quarter time typist to transcribe the research and maintain the files. ... \$ 1,800

Fringe ... \$ 369

5. Supplies, duplication, telephone and limited acquisition of documents not available in Cornell libraries. ... \$ 2,400

6. Four trips, Ithaca-Washington ... \$ 1,000

One trip to Geneva and perhaps FAO Rome to consult with researchers investigating this problem. ... \$ 2,500

7. An international workshop at the conclusion of the research period to review the state of knowledge. ... \$10,000

8. Cornell overhead (61.8% of salaries). ... \$ 7,045

TOTAL \$34,714

We shall be able to initiate this program as soon as the grant is available and would expect to complete the first phase of the research for which these funds are requested within 12 months.

PARTICIPATING FACULTY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Douglas Ashford	Government
*Milton Barnett	Rural Sociology
Harold Capener	Rural Sociology
*John Cohen	Rural Sociology
Roy Colle	Communication Arts
*James Converse	Rural Sociology (on leave)
Walter Coward	Rural Sociology
*Robert Crawford	Communication Arts
*Tom E. Davis	Economics
Matt Drosdoff	Agronomy
Eugene Erickson	Rural Sociology
*Milton Esman	Government (ex-officio, CIS)
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William Goldsmith	Regional Planning
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Henry Munger	Plant Breeding
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Frank Young	Rural Sociology
Ruth Young	Rural Sociology
Larry Zuidema	International Agriculture

\*members of the RDC Executive Committee

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