

Distributing Land from the Poor to the Rich: The World Bank's Role in Global Land Grabs

By [Global Research News](#)

Global Research, April 02, 2015

[APC](#) 27 March 2015

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

The Asian Peasant Coalition (APC) denounced the World Bank (WB) on its “16th Conference on Land and Poverty” that brings together corporations, governments and some civil society groups. The conference [was] taking place at Washington D.C. from March 23 to 27.

“Under the guise of the need to feed 9 billion people by 2050, the FAO and WB reported that the world needs to increase investment in agriculture, coming from the public and private sectors. The FAO estimates that private sector agricultural investment alone, including foreign direct investment, must rise from some \$142 billion per year to \$209 billion in order to feed a growing population. In 2013 alone, WB investment to agriculture and agriculture-related projects was over \$8 billion. But for whom are these investments?” questioned Rahmat Ajiguna, APC deputy secretary general, also the secretary general of the Indonesia based Aliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria (AGRA).

“We strongly condemn the WB for its role in global land grabs. In 1970s, the WB actually promoted its own brand of ‘market-assisted land reform’, ” stated Ajiguna adding that “according to the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), after President Ferdinand Marcos’ ouster in 1986 in the Philippines, the Corazon Aquino government was compelled by the strength of both the armed and legal movement for genuine land reform to come up with its own agrarian reform program. But Aquino’s Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), which ironically was also implemented by her son, President Benigno Aquino III, was never meant to distribute land to the poor and landless peasants. CARP clearly echoed many of the recommendations of the WB’s 1975 Land Reform Policy Paper. Worst of all, the WB land reform concept is indeed distributing land — from the poor to the rich.”

“How market-assisted land reform works in practice can be seen in the Philippines, with the most unequal land distributions in the world. The WB project undermines agrarian reform in the Philippines which actually increases concentration of land in the hands of the landed elite,” remarked Ajiguna adding that “KMP reports that after 27 years of the bogus CARP, the land grabbing spree of Gregorio “Greggy” Araneta III, common relative of Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Mar Roxas and Senator Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, in a more than 3,000-hectare agricultural land in the City of San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan continues. To protect their interests, Araneta terrorizes the farmers thru his more than 200 security guards that served as his private army. Farmers are prohibited from planting and harvesting their produce.” Araneta is the brother-in-law of Marcos. On the other hand, Roxas’ mother, Judy Araneta belongs to the landlord Araneta clan.

“The same is happening in other countries in Asia. In Indonesia, the WBs land grabbing

works through the government's agricultural and land policies. The recent law on industrial agriculture which gives agri-industry companies the right to invest more in agriculture is one of the examples how this WB works. This is concrete in the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in Papua, where the Indonesian government uses the new law (Law No. 2 2012) to provide so-called land for development and public interest on agriculture to develop 1.6 million hectares of primary forest to be converted into the integrated agro fuels and food estate," Ajiguna explained adding that " this law and other agrarian scheme is being used by President Jokowi in the coming celebration of the 60th Asia Africa Conference (popularly known as Bandung Conference) on April 19 to 24 to invite more investors, in infrastructure and food, which will worsen the implementation of Public Private Partnership (PPP) in the country."

"In Sri Lanka, WB invested \$18 million in a so-called 'Sustainable Tourism Development Project' signed in January 2010 which is the reason for the conversion of the ancestral lands in Panama into a tourism zone. This was disclosed after the International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) organized by APC in 2013 where we found out that the WB in collaboration with the Sri Lankan government is to blame for the impacts of Arugam Bay Tourism Promotion Zone in Panama in Southeast Sri Lanka. The Arugam Bay has more than 20,000 people," stated Zenaida Soriano, APC Southeast Asia coordinator also the chairperson of the Philippine-based National Federation of Peasant Women (AMIHAN).

"What the WB is doing is global land grabbing at the highest level. The WB further destroys the livelihood of small farmers and landless peasants. Therefore, the people especially the food producers and landless peasants have to resist this phenomenon of global land grabbing," added Soriano.

"On March 23-24, at least 200 farmers led by the KMP and the Alliance of Farmers in Bulacan -San Jose Del Monte camped out in front of the DILG office calling on Secretary Roxas and Senator Marcos to immediately stop the land grabbing of agricultural lands in the City of San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan and to pull out Araneta's private army. On March 24, farmers and their allies marched to Mendiola to call for the ouster of the landlord President Aquino", ended Soriano.

The APC calls on all stakeholders to reject the WB's Conference on Land and Poverty because it will further strengthen the collaboration of the imperialist countries and their puppet governments under the guise of investment and development but in reality it will only advance its role in global land grabbing.

"Genuine land reform will only be realized through resolute and militant struggle of the organized peasantry who will exact a just distribution of land. It is therefore crucial to strengthen the peasant movement at the local and international level. The peasant movement should likewise be integrated with the overall people's movement against the reactionary forces of imperialism," ended Ajiguna.

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