Implementing Land Reform: The Case of Costa Rica

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Costa Rica has made great strides in literacy, health care, and education and is one of Central America's most stable nations. But, argues the author, who is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Arizona, its land tenure system remains far from egalitarian, and the country as a whole is little understood.

COSTA RICA is one of Latin America's most misunderstood nations. The common perception, even among many otherwise well-informed Latin American specialists, is that this small Central American republic is economically agrarian, socially egalitarian, and politically democratic. Moreover, it is widely believed that within the agricultural sector yeoman farmers predominate. While it is certainly true that in any comparative sense Costa Rica's political system is democratic, featuring high levels of political participation, regular competitive and free elections, widespread enjoyment of civil liberites, and respect for human rights,[1] its economic system is far from agrarian, and its social system far from egalitarian. By 1980 only 29 percent of Costa Rica's labor force worked in agriculture; only 15 out of 96 low- and middle-income economies have a lower proportion of their work force in agriculture (World Bank, 1982: 146-47). Although data on social equality are not as plentiful, we know that the lowest 20 percent of the Costa Rican population earned only 3.3 percent of the total household income, ranking it sixth most unequal out of twenty-three low- and middle-income economies for which we have data (World Bank, 1982: 158-59). To Costa Rica's credit, it has made great strides in health, raising life expectancy to seventy years by 1980, only four years behind the United States. It has also achieved enviable education standards, with 90 percent literacy and a higher proportion of its 20- to 24-year-olds enrolled in higher education than the United Kingdom, Finland, or Switzerland. These accomplishments, however, generally have not been translated into greater economic equality, especially for Costa Rica's rural dwellers.

Central to understanding the causes of inequality in Costa Rica is an appreciation of the nature of the land tenure system. Those who still believe that Costa Rica is the land of the yeoman are seriously mistaken.[2] The most recent agricultural census (1973) shows that the largest farms, constituting 1 percent of all farms, account for over 25 percent of the land in farms, while at the other extreme the smallest farms, 37 percent of the total number of holdings, control only 1 percent of the land in farms. Moreover, the land distribution of other Central American countries, frequently singled out as being notoriously inequitable, is not noticeably worse than that of Costa Rica. A comparison of Gini indices supports this claim: Costa Rica 0.82; El Salvador 0.83; Guatemala 0.86.[3] Not only is property inequitably distributed among the landed, but most Costa Rican peasants own no land at all. Although estimates vary (see the third part of this article), somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of the economically active population in agriculture are landless. The link between poverty and agrarian structure has been made clear by Cespedes et al. (1977), whose study of poverty in Costa Rica revealed that three-quarters of the poor (defined by AID criteria) live in rural areas, and between 55 and 60 percent of the rural poor are landless. Among the landed peasants, problems of title insecurity are widespread, with estimates of between 44 and 66 percent of landed peasants not holding title to their land (Seligson, 1982*a*: 37).

In an effort to respond to the problem of landlessness and title insecurity, the Costa Rica government since 1962 has been pursuing a land reform program. This paper will not attempt to summarize the legislative history of the reform since that subject has been reported on in considerable detail (Rowles, 1982). This article will also avoid discussing the various stages and transformations through which the reform program has gone because that ground has already been covered (Seligson, 1979, 1980*a*). The focus of this article, rather, is on the implementation and impact of the reform.

The Implementation of Reform

Expropriation

The land reform legislation, approved in October 1961, provided guidelines as to which land was to be targeted for expropriation by the Instituto de Tierras y Colonizacion (ITCO), the administrative arm of the reform law. The law specified that land which was not fulfilling its social function was expropriable. In concrete terms this was defined as: (1) uncultivated land or land which has not been cultivated for the five years prior to the initiation of expropriation proceedings, the largest farms being the primary targets; (2) land suitable for agriculture purposes, but which is being used instead for cattle raising; (3) "*latifundios*" (the minimum size of which was left undefined); and (4) land suitable for irrigation.

This broad mandate, however, confronted three serious obstacles in its implementation. First, only the Legislative Assembly had the power to declare that a particular property was not fulfilling its social function and therefore was to be subject to

expropriation. This limitation grew out of a constitutional provision (Article 45) which establishes the inviolability of private property except in cases which may be determined by the legislative authority. This restriction on the land reform agency resulted in its decisions being subjected to the political scrutiny and possible veto of the legislative authority. In essence, the restriction made it possible for all expropriation decisions to be politicized.

The second obstacle faced by ITCO in its expropriation efforts was the limitation imposed on indemnization. According to the Constitution, expropriation could occur only with prior indemnization. Although the ITCO law provided for such payment in cash or in bonds, the Costa Rican Supreme Court ruled in 1967 that owners could not be forced to accept anything but cash for their expropriated property (Salas Marrero and Barahona Israel, 1973: 74-84). This restriction on payment proved even more serious than it at first had appeared to be. In 1969 the Suprreme Court ruled unconstitutional the provision of the ITCO laws which provided for expropriation at the value declared for tax purposes. From that point on owners could insist on the fair market value of property ITCO wished to expropriate (ibid.: 861-87).

Finally, with the exception of a brief period from 1975 to 1978, ITCO's budget for expropriation has been very limited. In 1975 ITCO was given the authority to issue the equivalent of nearly $12 million in agrarian bonds. These bonds, however, were quickly spent on the several large expropriations which took place from 1975 to 1978, leaving the institute limited resources with which to continue the expropriation process.

As a result of the limitations on expropriations, ITCO has never been able to develop an overall plan for land redistribution. Rather, its expropriation decisions have largely been made in reaction to outbreaks of squatting in one area of the country or another. In effect, ITCO has more often than not seen itself in the role of a fireman, rushing from place to place attempting to put out the fires of land-based rural unrest.

There is a positive side, however, to the "fireman" strategy which ITCO has been forced to pursue in that land reform has been more responsive to peasant demands than it might otherwise have been. In essence, Costa Rican peasants set the expropriation agenda for the land reform agency by invading land and thereby forcing ITCO to react. The immediate result of this process is that in many instances, squatters reside in villages surrounding the invaded land and therefore undergo little or no social dislocation in the course of the settlement process. At the same time, of course, this type of reform makes it very difficult for ITCO to pursue a coherent strategy and concentrate its scarce capital and human resources in areas which have been determined to have the highest probable payoff in terms of agrarian development.

Beneficiary Selection

The ITCO law specifies that the principal beneficiaries of the reform are to be landless and landed poor agricultural workers. Since the number of people in this category

has always far exceeded the land that ITCO has available for distribution, procedures have been established to identify potential beneficiaries. While in the early years these procedures were honored more in the breach than in practice, and political considerations were sometimes used to select the favored few, a more rigorous application of these procedures has become the rule in recent years.

In 1979 ITCO drew up a formal manual for beneficiary selection which established criteria for eligibility. Candidates must be between 18 and 60 years of age, have experience in agricultural work, and earn a family income below the minimum wage. Special preference is shown for those who are heads of large families and who reside in areas near sites where ITCO already has land available for settlement. Specifically excluded from eligibility are those who have had trouble with the law, have been shown to be land speculators, or who have been expelled from an ITCO project. In practice, bachelors and single women are unlikely to be granted a plot of land.

While these are the general criteria which ITCO has applied for beneficiary selection, it has increasingly focused its attention on groups of beneficiaries rather than individuals. In practically all cases in the past few years, ITCO has encouraged individual peasants to organize themselves into action groups and to have them select a farm they think will be suitable for their needs. ITCO officials meet with these groups rather than with individuals and try to determine if the proposed acquisition is feasible under the particular circumstances. Central to the feasibility question is the willingness of the present owners to sell. Another consideration is the agricultural potential of the land. An evaluation is made by ITCO's Beneficiary Selection Department of the seriousness and responsibility of the petitioning group. If all these assessments are positive, and ITCO has the funds, expropriation may proceed.

Administration of the Reform

ONCE AN AGREEMENT has been reached between the owner and ITCO regarding the conditions of the sale, expropriation procedures are initiated and settlement begins. In some cases, however, settlers have already invaded the farm, staking their claim to the property before ITCO has purchased it. This presents the institute with a serious problem because frequently the land is not divided up among the settlers in a rational or equitable manner. In addition, among the settlers there may be some individuals who fail to meet ITCO's selection criteria. The end result in these cases is considerable tension between the institute and some of the settlers while conflicts are being resolved.

Once settlement has gotten underway, ITCO's Division of Titling interviews each beneficiary, recording information regarding the legal characteristics of the beneficiary and the precise location of the plot. The granting of the titles, however, is usually delayed for several years because ITCO prefers to wait until it becomes clear that the settler is unlikely to abandon the property in order to use his newly acquired title as a negotiable instrument.

Until title is granted, beneficiaries have little or no access to bank credit. ITCO has attempted to meet the demand for credit but to date has had neither the financial nor the technical resources to do so on a large scale. Beginning this year, however, a Caja Agraria has been established within the institute for the purpose of providing production credit in the early years of settlement. It is not possible at this point to determine if this arrangement will be successful or if sufficient funds will be available, but limited credit availability in the past has been a central factor limiting the progress of settlers.

ITCO has been somewhat more successful in providing technical assistance to its beneficiaries. A large proportion of the institute's staff are agronomists or extension agents with at least a high school degree in agriculture. The beneficiaries rely heavily on this assistance as the Ministry of Agriculture has tended to shy away from using its limited resources for the benefit of ITCO settlements.

In sum, implementation of land reform is primarily a reactive process. The institute has neither the capital nor the human resources to satisfy the demands placed upon it. As a result, it puts its "grease" where the wheel squeaks the loudest. Indeed, if it were to do otherwise, it would find a rapid diminution of support from Costa Rica's political leaders, who see the institute as a "rural Valium."

The rapid movement of Costa Ricans from rural to urban settings in the past ten years has meant that problems of urbanization have taken precedence among the priorities established by the politicos. With only 29 percent of its work force in agriculture (1980), Costa Rican leaders seek rural tranquility as the nation undergoes intensified urbanization. ITCO has played and will continue to play a key role in assuring that tranquility.

The Impact of Reform

Amount of Land Distributed

From its founding in 1963 up through 1980, ITCO acquired approximately 982,000 hectares of land out of a national land area of 5,090,000 hectares, or 19.3 percent of the national territory. This figure exaggerates, however, the amount of land available for settlement since some of the land that ITCO has acquired is suitable primarily for forest reserves and will not, therefore, be distributed for peasant use. Morever, this figure also includes lands invaded by squatters and therefore includes lands which are not available for further distribution to the landless. A more realistic picture of ITCO's impact is obtained by examining land distributed, the most recent data for which are available up through September 1979 (see Table 1). A total of 782,889 hectares of land has been subject to either redistribution or titling, the great bulk of the land falling into the latter category. If one is willing to include the provision of titles to squatters as part of land reform, then the 782,889 hectares of land titled and distributed amounts to 15.3 percent of the national land area or 25.1 percent of the total land in farms as of the 1973 census (3,122,456 hectares). On the other hand, if

the only land to be included in one's estimate of the impact of land reform is the land actually expropriated and redistributed, then the impact is much smaller. Land redistribution amounted to only 167,134 hectares or 3.3 percent of the national territory and 5.4 percent of the land in farms in 1973.

Table 1. Land distribution and titling, 1962-79

Program	Area (hectares)	Population benefited: number of families	Population benefited: total estimated population
Total	782,889	33,665	201,860
Peasant settlements	167,134	5,428	32,438
Squatters receiving title			
in state farms	39,974	2,583	15,498
in private farms	115,492	2,833	16,998
Land ordering	111,078	2,201	13,206
Titling in national reserves	339,761	20,462	122,772
Indian reservations	9,450	158	948

Source: Seligson, 1980.

No entirely satisfactory estimates of the magnitude of the landless population have been developed.[4] The most frequently cited studies are derived from a *post hoc* effort to link the 1973 agriculture and population censuses (Cespedes et al., 1977). The results of that effort, as interpolated by an AID report (Riordin, 1979), yields 265,076 rural landless poor and 119,929 near-landless rural poor (i.e., holdings of under 2 hectares), for a total of approximately 385,000 landless and near-landless people. Since the average family size of these individuals was 6.8, a total of approximately 38,980 landless and 17,637 land-poor families is thought to have been present in 1973.[5] Based on population projections (Mernies, 1979), AID has estimated that approximately 900 new landless families are added each year (AID, 1980: Annex II-C, p. 1), meaning that by 1979, the date of the most recent land reform information, an additional 5,400 landless families will have been added, bringing the total landless to an estimated 44,380.

Land redistribution activities have been directed almost exclusively at landless peasants. A 1976 survey of 753 ITCO land redistribution beneficiaries[6] determined that only 91.4 percent owned any land prior to receiving land from ITCO. As is shown in Table 1, ITCO settled 5,428 families, or an estimated 32,438 individuals, on a total of 167,134 hectares of land. Assuming that as determined by the 1976 survey, 91.4 percent of those were landless peasants, ITCO has provided land to nearly 5,000 ($5{,}428 \times 91.4\% = 4{,}961$) landless families out of the estimated 44,380 landless families in the country in 1979. Put in other terms, over the 1963–79 period ITCO distributed land to approximately 300 families a year, while the size of the landless population was growing at a rate of roughly 900 families a year. However, this calculation does not reflect that fully 72 percent of the families settled were given land between 1975 and 1979, indicating a rapidly quickening pace of reform (see Seligson, 1979, 1980*a*, for an explanation of this change of pace). Even at this

greatly accelerated rate, the redistribution program is lagging behind the growth of the landless poor by over 100 families a year.

Amount of Land Titled

In an effort to reduce the problem of insecure land ownership, ITCO was given the authority to undertake administrative titling, a streamlined procedure which circumvented many of the expensive and time-consuming activities of the judicial procedure. In order to speed up the administrative titling efforts, AID provided $2.7 million of a 1970 agricultural sector loan (totaling $15.9 million) to cover photogrammetric surveying and related costs for 660,000 hectares on which an estimated 27,000 untitled landowners were farming. Additional AID support of $2.1 million has been provided as part of a new loan (total $10 million) to continue the titling effort.

Significant progress has been made, as is shown in Table 2, although the rate of titling often dropped far below the projected rate. Hence a total of 24,510 farms had been titled up through the end of 1978. The current goal is to title 1.5 million hectares of land and issue nearly 37,000 titles over the next five years.

Table 2. Titles granted by ITCO, 1965-78

Program	1965-78 Total	1965-66	1967-68	1969-70	1971-72	1973-74	1975-76	1977-78
Total	24,510	303	1,225	959	2,992	8,962	5,446	4,623
Peasant settlements	1,757	—	217	100	12	132	232	1,014
Squatting on private farms	819	—	161	1	27	577	53	—
Squatting on state farms	2,480	172	665	141	1,120	36	125	221
Ordering on ITCO reserves	1,661	—	—	—	—	—	189	1,472
Titling of national reserve lands	17,710	131	182	717	1,750	8,217	4,797	1,916
Indian reservations	89	—	—	—	83	—	—	—

Source: ITCO files.

Production

ITCO has fallen far behind in providing production data for its settlements, but current data are probably not much changed from 1976, the most recent year available. By 1976 ITCO had settled 4,186 families on 111,015 hectares of land. In that year, as is shown in Table 3, the total value of production of the settlers came to $9,323 million (80,177,985 colones). This contrasts with total national agricultural and livestock production in 1976 of $606 million (5,212.3 million colones), meaning that the ITCO settlers produced about 1.5 percent of Costa Rica's agricultural

wealth.[7] Production is concentrated in annual crops, with 40 percent of the value of production concentrated in rice, beans, and other annual crops, 25 percent in bananas (for export), 9 percent in coffee, and the remainder in other crops and livestock (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Total value of production on reform settlements according to type of crop, 1974, 1975, 1976 (dollars)

Crop or activity	1974	1975	1976
1. *Perennial crops*	1,330,048.85	1,821,902.95	2,472,250.77
Coffee	494,407.38	437,800.16	879,441.86
Sugar cane	337,167.17	391,064.23	437,865.86
Musaceae	365,092.00	745,479.23	829,597.67
Cocoa	101,860.47	98,250.36	104,327.14
Papaya	22,617.73	49,882.19	5,800.25
Others	8,904.10	99,426.78	11,561.25
2. *Annual crops*	1,909,393.38	2,596,628.58	3,671,615.69
2.1 *Basic Grains*	884,642.35	1,969,535.10	2,838,977.22
Rice	434,463.56	962,501.68	1,156,432.15
Corn	353,011.63	794,021.70	1,481,419.07
Beans	97,167.16	213,011.72	201,126.00
2.2 *Others*	1,024,751.03	627,093.48	832,638.47
Cassava	526,279.07	373,454.96	405,053.00
Potatoes	109,433.14	80,586.05	90,674.42
Vegetables	78,487.55	63,394.89	49,250.16
Others	310,551.28	109,657.58	287,660.89
3. *Dairy products*	422,835.81	541,111.63	650,448.23
Milk	374,055.26	450,947.41	554,490.63
Cheese	48,780.55	90,164.22	95,957.60
Subtotal of 1, 2, 3	3,662,278.05	4,959,643.16	6,794,314.69
Bananas	890,449.64	744,513.02	2,296,144.53
Sale of livestock	123,032.56	165,353.45	232,562.30
Total	4,675,760.24	5,869,509.63	9,323,021.52

Source: Salazar et al., 1977.

Table 4. Total production volume (in kilograms) of the peasant settlements as a percentage of the volume of national production according to type of crop

Crop	Settlements (1976)	All Costa Rica (1976)	Percent of national production
Perennial crops			
Coffee	2,916,751	86,124,000	3.3
Sugar cane	32,977	2,048,984	1.6
Annual crops			
Rice	4,688,642	96,250,000	4.9
Corn	8,984,709	101,619,000	8.8
Beans	397,136	18,800,000	2.1

Source: Salazar et al., 1977, and OPSA, 1978.

Crop yield data for the settlements are scanty, but some comparisons are possible. As shown in Table 5, ITCO beneficiaries are very successful producers of basic grains, exceeding the national average yield data for rice, corn, and beans. Their success in coffee and sugar cane, however, is more limited, their yields dropping considerably below the national average. These latter two crops, in Costa Rica, are those which are most highly capital intensive, with yields depending heavily on mechanization, fertilization, and disease control. Since by definition ITCO beneficiaries are poor, it is not surprising that they are less successful in coffee and sugar cane than they are at basic grain production.

Table 5. Yield per hectare of the production of rice, corn, coffee, and sugar cane in the settlements and at national level

Type of crop	Average yield of settlements (kg. per hectare)	Average national yield (1976)
Rice	1,273	862
Corn	1,682	1,420
Beans	560	460
Coffee	15.49[1]	18.53[1]
Sugar Cane	38,270	58,000

[1] "*Fanegas*" per hectare.

Source: Salazar et al., 1977, and OPSA, 1978.

Income

Measuring income among peasants is a difficult task. There exist two different ways of doing so for ITCO beneficiaries. One, the method selected by ITCO, is to divide the total income (production minus estimated costs of production) for the settlement by the number of settlers and thereby produce an overall income figure. Doing so yields a figure of $1,572 per family for the 1976 production data (Salazar et al., 1977). The second method, which uses the 1976 survey of beneficiaries, produced a total family income of $1,215 per year. On a per capita basis, assuming six people per family, the ITCO figures yield $262, and the survey yields $203.[8] Whichever figure is used, it still falls below the AID poverty line of $330 in 1976.[9] Moreover, the mean figures are not deceptive since the survey data show that only 18 percent of the settlers earned incomes above the poverty line. These findings have led AID to suggest that ITCO's programs have merely served to convert the landless poor into the landed poor.

Other data provide a different perspective on settler income. Compared to the minimum wage figures, the income that the landless laborer presumably was earning before he received land from ITCO, the beneficiaries earned an average 67.5 percent above that minimum. However, this assumes that there is only one income earner in the family, whereas it is more realistic to assume that other members of the family contribute to the household income of the landless peasants.

Perhaps the clearest way of looking at the relative well-being of land reform beneficiaries in Costa Rica is to compare their ownership of household artifacts and their utilization of services provided by public utilities. In Table 6 a comparison of the 1976 sample of ITCO beneficiaries with a 1976 national probability sample of the population reveals that ITCO beneficiaries are far worse off.[10] While the ITCO beneficiaries are somewhat more likely to have electricity than either the landed or landless peasant of the general population, they are far worse off in terms of having piped-in water, electric irons, televisions, indoor sanitary facilities, and refrigerators. Only when it comes to owning sewing machines do the reform beneficiaries do better than the landless peasants. In no category do they come close to the landed peasants in the general population. No doubt, however, some of the gap between the reform beneficiaries and the landed peasants of the rest of the country is a function of the limited number of years that the beneficiaries have had their land. The average number of years was less than five, with 18 percent of the settlers having their plots for fewer than two years.

Table 6. Indicators of wealth among settlers and general population

Household has:	Reform beneficiaries		General population (males only) non-agricultural	landless peasants	landed peasants
	%	(N)	%	%	%
Radio	81.6	(613)	—	—	—
Electricity	76.3	(551)	92.3	58.5	53.3
Piped-in water	60.9	(440)	96.1	76/0	71.3
Wrist watch	49.5	(371)	—	—	—
Sewing machine	44.5	(334)	49.1	22.8	46.5
Dirt floors	26.8	(188)	—	—	—
Electric iron	18.4	(138)	86.5	35.7	47.5
Television	12.8	(96)	79.6	31.0	45.5
Indoor sanitary facilities	6.7	(48)	75.5	26.9	35.6
Refrigerator	5.5	(41)	57.1	12.3	22.8

Source: Seligson, 1982. Data on reform beneficiaries are from 1976 sample of 753 respondents from 22 settlements. Data on the general population are drawn from a 1976 national probability sample of 1,707 respondents.

One would expect that over time both income and ownership of artifacts in the home would increase among settlers. However, it is unclear whether the wide gap between the reform beneficiaries and the small holding peasant is only a function of time. Other factors such as access to credit and technical assistance no doubt play a key role.

Yet, in spite of these doubts regarding the economic success of the beneficiaries, it is clear that most settlers are very satisfied with the progress they have made. In asking the beneficiaries whether they felt that they were better off, worse off, or the same as before they had joined the ITCO settlement, 85 percent responded "better off," and only 3 percent responded "worse off," with the remaining 12 percent stating that they were about the same.

There are no data on the impact of the titling program on income, but a 1980 survey of 100 title recipients found that 66.3 percent felt that their economic situation had improved since receiving title (Seligson, 1982*a*). While these data present a subjective opinion on the part of the titling beneficiaries, they probably have an objective basis, since it was also found that beneficiaries of this program reported a 44 percent increase in credit since having received title. The availability of credit in Costa Rica has been shown to be a key factor in agricultural productivity. Hence the titling program is most likely responsible for an improvement in the income levels of its beneficiaries.

Employment

There are few data on the impact of land reform on employment. The International Labour Organization has initiated a long-term project studying employment problems on ITCO settlements, but few hard data have been produced (ILO, 1972, 1975, 1979). The ILO estimates that in 1976 between 70,000 to 80,000 rural Costa Ricans were under- or unemployed (ILO, 1979:35). More precise and recent estimates are available which show that unemployment and underemployment are growing problems in Costa Rica, more seriously affecting rural areas than urban ones. Whereas in 1978 open unemployment in rural areas was considerably lower than in urban areas (3.4 percent vs. 5.7 percent in November 1978), underemployment was higher in the countryside than in the city (8.5 percent vs. 5.8 percent). By July 1981, however, rural unemployment had grown more rapidly than urban unemployment and came close to exceeding those levels (8.4 percent vs. 9.1 percent). At this same point in time rural underemployment was nearly double urban underemployment (10.8 percent vs. 6.4 percent). In total, by July 1981 unemployment and underemployment in rural Costa Rica reached 19.2 percent (Cespedes et al., 1981: 110). Moreover, agriculture is the least dynamic sector insofar as its labor-absorptive capacity is concerned. Between 1976 and 1981 a total of 13,000 jobs was lost in the agricultural sector, the only economic sector to suffer an absolute net decline in this period (Cespedes et al., 1981: 107). From a longer-term perspective agriculture is rapidly diminishing as a major source of employment. Hence, whereas in 1950, 54.7 percent of the labor force was employed in the agricultural sector, by 1981 this figure dropped to 27.8 percent (Cespedes et al., 1981: 104). This decline reflects the growing urbanization and industrialization of Costa Rica. In absolute terms, however, there were 34 percent more people employed in agriculture in 1981 than there were in 1950 (202,023 vs. 150,317). Hence, despite its declining role the agricultural sector remains an important source of employment for many Costa Ricans.

In the context of the above discussion, ITCO's role in generating employment has been minimal. The 5,000-plus families settled on ITCO lands between 1963 and 1979 amounted to only 3 percent of those employed in the agricultural sector in 1979 (205,606 persons); and almost all of these, the 1976 survey shows, had already been employed in agriculture prior to their receiving land from ITCO. The impact of

ITCO's settlement program, however, exceeds these narrow limits, but in ways that are not quantified. For each family settled it is likely that the farm provides at least partial employment for the wife, who most likely would have been unemployed, while the husband worked as a landless laborer. Moreover, the children of the settlers are frequently found working on their father's farm. Yet, even if we include these secondary employment effects, the impact of the land reform on employment has been limited.

Participation[11]

Participation among beneficiaries of agrarian reform in Costa Rica is the area about which we have the richest and most complete data. The 1976 survey of 753 beneficiaries combined with the national probability sample of nonbeneficiaries taken the same year provides the data base.

We have data on two basic forms of participation: political and cooperative. Political participation is defined here as "those activities which influence, or are intended to influence, the distribution of public goods (Seligson and Booth, 1976, 1978). Such a definition is broad enough to encompass a wide range of political activities which do not involve the formal institutions of government. It is in these activities where much peasant participation is found. Two basic types of political participation are reported on in this paper: institutionalized and mobilized. Institutionalized modes of participation are essentially those forms of conventional participation which political scientists have been writing about for many years. Such participation includes activism in political parties and voting, but also includes contacting public officials and political communication. Mobilized political participation includes such activities as participation in strikes and land invasions.[12] Cooperative participation concerns attendance at community organizations and cooperatives.

Political participation. Political participation in conventional party and election-related activities was found to be quite high among ITCO beneficiaries. For example, it was found that 85.2 percent of the beneficiaries voted in the election immediately prior to the interview, whereas nationwide only 79.9 percent of Costa Ricans voted in that election. Since voting turnout is higher in Costa Rica among the better educated and wealthier citizens, the higher turnout levels among the reform peasants is truly impressive. Participation in campaigns was comparatively high, with 27.5 percent of the respondents reporting attending political meetings and rallies, contrasted to a figure of 19 percent of a cross-section sample of the United States (Verba and Nie, 1972). Less frequent party participation involved direct involvement in election campaigns, such as working for political parties or contributing money to a candidate or party.

Reform beneficiaries are also comparatively active in political contacting. As is shown in Table 7, nearly half of the respondents (46.3 percent) had asked an ITCO official for help. Much lower levels of contacting are found with other public

officials, such as the police, municipal executives, congressmen, etc. But even here, reform beneficiaries are generally more likely to have had such contact than are peasants who have not benefited from ITCO's programs. The only notable area in which participation was lower than expected occurs in contact with municipal councilmen. The probable explanation for this is that reform beneficiaries tend to direct their attention more toward ITCO than to local municipal officials who, in any event, tend to believe that problems on ITCO settlements should be solved by the land reform agency rather than by the local government.

Table 7. Political participation: contacting[1]

Question: Have you ever asked for help on a personal or family problem from any of the following: (percent answering "yes")

Person or institution	Entire sample		General population (males only) peasants		urbanites		peasant/urbanite sig. (t-test)
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	
ITCO	43.3	(349)	—	—	—	—	—
The police	12.2	(92)	7.1	(22)	8.8	(30)	ns
Municipal executive	10.0	(75)	9.3	(29)	17.1	(58)	.003
A congressman (*diputado*)	9.6	(72)	10.6	(33)	12.1	(41)	ns
A government office	8.5	(64)	—	—	—	—	—
A political party member	8.1	(61)	—	—	—	—	—
A councilman (*municipe*)	6.6	(50)	9.9	(31)	10.9	(37)	ns
Sample size		(753)		(312)		(339)	

[1]*N* refers to number of respondents who reported contacts.
Source: Booth et al., 1973, and data tapes used for that study.

Cooperative participation. Reform beneficiaries are very frequent participants in two major types of community organization. As shown in Table 8, over half of the respondents in the survey participated in cooperatives, and nearly one-third did so frequently. Compared to the general population, participation in cooperatives among reform beneficiaries is much more frequent. It is also the case that beneficiaries participate much more frequently than the general population in the major neighborhood school-related organization, the Junta de Educacion, although participation in this organization is much lower than it is in the cooperatives. Cooperatives and school boards are the only organizations, however, in which the reform beneficiaries are more highly participatory than the general population. Hence beneficiaries attend meetings of community development associations, municipal government, and political parties with about the same frequency as does the general population.

These findings are not surprising. ITCO has spent much time and effort promoting

Table 8. Cooperative behavior: settlers and general population

Question: I am going to name several organizations. Tell me if you attend their meetings, and if so, how frequently?

Organization attendance	Reform beneficiaries		General population (males only) non-agricultural		landless peasants		landed peasants	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Cooperative:								
Frequent	36.0	(271)	4.1	(22)	2.3	(4)	4.0	(4)
Once in a while	11.0	(83)	3.4	(18)	0.6	(1)	7.9	(8)
Infrequently	6.1	(46)	2.1	(11)	1.8	(3)	5.9	(6)
Never	46.9	(353)	90.1	(481)	95.3	(163)	82.2	(83)
	100.0	(753)	100.0	(532)	100.0	(171)	100.0	(101)
School board:			(either school board or PTA)					
Frequent	12.1	(91)	3.2	(17)	8.2	(14)	4.0	(4)
Once in a while	8.1	(61)	3.0	(16)	6.4	(11)	7.9	(8)
Infrequent	6.0	(45)	1.9	(10)	2.3	(4)	7.9	(8)
Never	73.8	(556)	91.8	(490)	83.0	(142)	80.2	(81)
	100.0	(753)	100.0	(533)	100.0	(171)	100.0	(101)
Parent-teacher association:								
Frequent	10.4	(78)						
Once in a while	7.2	(54)			(see above)			
Infrequent	6.2	(47)						
Never	76.2	(574)						
Community development association:								
Frequent	5.6	(42)	1.7	(9)	5.3	(9)	6.9	(7)
Once in a while	4.0	(30)	2.6	(14)	1.8	(3)	9.9	(10)
Infrequent	1.9	(14)	3.4	(18)	2.9	(5)	2.0	(2)
Never	88.6	(667)	91.1	(491)	90.1	(154)	81.2	(82)
	100.0	(753)	100.0	(532)	100.0	(171)	100.0	(101)
Municipality (i.e., county council):								
Frequent	0.9	(7)	1.9	(10)	0.0	(0)	4.0	(4)
Once in a while	3.6	(27)	2.2	(12)	1.2	(2)	4.0	(4)
Infrequent	5.0	(38)	3.2	(17)	1.8	(3)	4.0	(4)
Never	90.4	(681)	92.7	(494)	97.1	(166)	88.1	(89)
	100.0	(753)	100.0	(533)	100.0	(171)	100.0	(101)
Political party:								
Frequent	1.1	(8)	2.6	(14)	1.2	(2)	4.0	(4)
Once in a while	2.5	(19)	1.3	(7)	1.8	(3)	1.0	(1)
Infrequent	3.5	(26)	0.9	(5)	1.8	(3)	2.0	(2)
Never	93.0	(700)	95.1	(506)	95.3	(163)	93.1	(94)
	100.0	(753)	100.0	(532)	100.0	(171)	100.0	(101)

(One or two cases of missing data in these variables were encountered.)

Sources: See Table 4.

cooperatives as the central organization structure on its projects. Moreover, since many settlements are located in regions which are fairly remote and in the process of being developed, it is only reasonable to expect the settlers to organize themselves collectively for marketing and service purposes. The primary school is often the only center of general community organization in these settlements, and therefore it is to be expected that participation in the schools of such settlements would be higher than in regions where there is a multiplicity of organizations.

The Future of Land Reform in Costa Rica

LAND REFORM in Costa Rica is today on the threshold of an era of new opportunity and potential impact. Starting in 1980, Costa Rica began to slide into the worst economic depression it has suffered since the 1930s. Brought on by an unfortunate confluence of both domestic and international circumstances, the economic crisis, according to most analysts, is so severe that income levels will not return to their 1980 levels until around 1990 (Seligson, forthcoming.) In February 1982 a new president was elected on a theme of "return to the land." One element in his program is expanded land reform.

One key element in the increased role for land reform in the 1980s is the passage on March 29, 1982, of new reform legislation (Law #7745). The legislation changes ITCO's name to the Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario (Agrarian Development Institute) and gives it broader powers to develop land reform within the context of a more broadly defined agrarian development program. In addition the new law provides, for the first time, for the establishment of agrarian tribunals. Since ITCO officials have frequently complained that the court system in Costa Rica is ultraconservative and biased in favor of large landholders, it is believed that these new agrarian tribunals may provide a more receptive forum for the small landholders. Finally, the new legislation substantially increases the reform agency's income from tax collections.

Another positive element on the horizon is increased foreign assistance. In 1980 AID agreed to a loan package of $10 million for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the land reform agency. It is too early, as of this writing, to determine the impact of that program. Other foreign donors and AID itself will be carefully watching the progress of the program.

Costa Rica's medium-term economic future remains very much in doubt. Most marcroeconomists (Cespedes et al., 1981) are pessimistic. The exhaustion of import substitution industrialization and the collapse of the Central America Common Market, two interrelated phenomena, have forced Costa Rican policymakers to reemphasize the agrarian sector in their developmental plans. Whether land reform is given a high priority or forced to take a backseat to agroindustrial development remains to be seen.

NOTES

1. Bollen's (1980) recent comparative study of democracy ranks Costa Rica among the most democratic countries in the world.
2. An explanation as to how Costa Rica's yeoman farmer, predominant in the colonial period, was superceded by a mass of landless or landed poor peasants is contained in Seligson (1980*b*). It should be noted that Gudmundson (1982) calls into question the predominance of the yeoman even in the colonial and early independence periods.
3. The calculation for Costa Rica is based on farms of all sizes. Elimination of the farms smaller than one *manzana* (0.69 hectare), as was done in the published 1963 census, lowers the Gini index to 0.80. The Costa Rica data are for 1973. The El Salvador data are for 1961; and the Guatemala data, based on preliminary tabulations, are for 1979 (see Hough et al., 1982).
4. The population and agriculture censuses of 1973 (the latest census year) were not linked, and neither the population nor agricultural census alone can yield a good estimate of the landless population. Unfortunately, no national study has ever been undertaken to provide a reasonable estimate of the magnitude of the landlessness problem.
5. This calculation is lower than that generated by the Cornell cross-national study, which estimates the landless and near landless in 1973 at 126,000 families (Lassen, 1980: 13). It is also disputed by Roy Prosterman (1980), a consultant for the American Institute for Free Labor Development. In a memorandum to U.S. Ambassador Frank McNeil, Prosterman calculates a figure of between 101,000 and 116,000 landless families in 1973. His calculations are also based on the 1973 agriculture and population censuses but use different assumptions from those employed by either AID or Cornell.
6. The survey was conducted in May and June of 1976; it involved interviews with 753 beneficiaries on 23 settlements. The study was funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Joint Population and Development Policy Research Program and received institutional support from ITCO. The author of this paper was the principal investigator of that study. Details of the sample are contained in Seligson (1982*b*).
7. One could add to these figures the production on lands for which ITCO has provided title, but that would be inappropriate since, with or without title, production would have taken place on these lands. As a practical matter, since ITCO does not collect data on production on land that it titles, no assessment of the total production of that sector is possible.
8. AID (1980: 12) used an average family size of 5.1 persons because many settlers had not yet completed their families at the time of the interview. Using that figure produces a mean per capita income of $238.
9. Defined as $150 of 1969 purchasing power per capita.
10. This national sample was collected by the Costa Rican Office of Public Opinion, a department of the Ministry of the Presidency. The sample contained 1,707 respondents. An extensive report comparing this survey with the ITCO data is contained in Seligson (1982*b*).
11. This section draws on Seligson (1982*b*), chaps. 3 and 5.
12. The distinction between institutionalized and mobilized forms of political participation is made in Seligson (1980*c*: 75, n. 1).

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