Chile: On Non-governmental Organizations' Role In Alleviating Rural Poverty

Barbara Khol
Chile: On Non-govermentlal Organizations' Role In Alleviating Rural Poverty

by Barbara Khol
Category/Department: General
Published: Tuesday, July 9, 1991

On July 3, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) praised non-governmental organizations in Chile for their efforts to alleviate rural poverty. At an FAO-sponsored meeting in Santiago the previous week, 60 NGOs analyzed conditions in rural Chile, and adopted measures to ensure a closer working relationship between the government and agricultural workers. The NGOs seek greater coordination of government and NGO rural projects to support small-scale farmers and attend to workers' demands. The FAO offered assistance in preparing a "rural development policy to face the challenge of modernization, while retaining the country's treasured values and its own cultural identity." According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), 17.8% of Chile's 14 million inhabitants reside in rural areas. About 2 million rural residents live in extreme poverty, result of unemployment, low wages, unprofitable agriculture and lack of social services. Cristian Vives of the Catholic Church's Social Action Department, said the government should find ways to overcome poverty and the exclusion of the rural population from political processes. Under the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet (1973-90), the government withdrew support to farmers, broke up peasant groups and left the rich to dominate local markets. Consequently, a third of the rural population lost their land and became temporary rural wage earners. Vives said the top third of landowners acquired more land. He added, "About half of the farmers became impoverished and were excluded from all support that would have allowed them to improve production and living conditions." NGOs attempted to fill the vacuum left by the Pinochet regime by offering support to the rural population. At present, over a year since President Patricio Aylwin took office, they have proposed programs to support the government's rural development efforts. Rafael Moreno, FAO representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, emphasized the need to establish a new group to foster improved coordination among the government, private groups and NGOs. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 07/03/91)

-- End --