Thank you very much. It’s great to be here and to have so many of you joining us for this year’s Land and Poverty Conference.

This is actually the 17th year of these conferences, and they have grown from a meeting of 30 researchers in 1999, to a week-long event that spans over 150 sessions and brings together over 1200 participants. To me, this demonstrates the enormous and growing importance of land issues for development.

I think so many people are interested in land because it’s such a multi-faceted issue that cuts across so many different elements of the sustainable development agenda. And, because of that, working on sustainability issues through the lens of land is key to finding integrated and long-lasting solutions to reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity – the two corporate goals for the World Bank Group.

In just an eight month period of time, the global development dialogue has become increasingly focused on issues of sustainability. And, as Asli mentioned earlier, land issues are increasingly at the center of this conversation.

In September of last year the UN General Assembly adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals, many of which focus directly on the importance of land and its many uses and functions.

In December, there was the COP21 in Paris where the importance of land and its uses featured in the conversations about ways to increase both mitigation and adaptation.
And undoubtedly, questions about land, and issues of

- lack of access to land,
- conflicts over land, and
- degradation of land

will figure prominently in the dialogue on forced displacement at the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May.

This growing – and clearly welcome – focus on sustainability is driven –of course- by the unrelenting progression of many global megatrends, their intensifying impact and the increasingly urgent need to take action.

Take population growth. This may sound obvious, but in just the next 15 years, global population will increase by another billion people, with the inevitable resulting pressure on land resources. To meet the demand for food -- production will need to grow by an average of 20% in that short time, and 55% in Africa.

The middle class will grow to almost 5 billion people, from just 2 billion now, which will lead to shifts in food tastes and consumption patterns. Meat consumption is expected to increase 40% faster than food consumption overall, with the resulting increase in livestock production having profound impacts on land use.

Urbanization is also accelerating rapidly, with an expected growth of 25% to 5 billion people by 2030, putting pressure on existing space and infrastructure, increasing land prices and reducing land access especially for the poor. UN Habitat estimates that some 900 million people are currently living in slum conditions, and this number is rising rapidly.
And these long-term megatrends are combining with more recent phenomena that will have equally important consequences.

Climate change could potentially have a negative effect on global crop yields by as much as 5 percent by 2030, even if you account for adaptive behaviors like changed agricultural practices and cropping patterns, and leaving many drylands areas unable to support the growing size of the populations that live there. The increase in frequency and intensity of severe weather will put many low lying and coastal lands at increased risk. At the same time, we will have a growing need to ensure adequate land is available to store and sequester carbon from the atmosphere and to generate carbon-neutral energy.

And more recently we have seen escalating forced displacement of people as a result of conflict, but also a result of environmental disruption and lack of access to productive land. In 2014, some 60 million people were displaced by conflict alone; the numbers in 2015 and 2016 are likely to be much higher. Since 2008, an average of 26 million people per year have been displaced by natural disasters. Added to this, the UN projects that over the next five years, some 50 million people could move out of areas in Sub-Saharan Africa that are suffering from desertification. Displaced people leave behind their land and property, which may have taken generations to acquire and need to be resettled elsewhere.

To address these increasing and competing demands, we will need to do a number of things:

• We need to be sure that property rights can be transferred in transparent ways to get better and more economic uses while at the same time, protecting against arbitrary allocations.
• We need to ensure that women have an equal chance to acquire resources and make decisions about their use in ways that benefit them and their families.
• We need to see that young people can access land and other productive assets so they can plan families and contribute to economic growth.

• We need to ensure that indigenous communities continue to serve as owners and stewards of their natural assets,

• We need to ensure that families or individuals who move from rural to urban areas have strong rights that allow them to leverage those assets through lease, sale, or mortgage so they can make good economic choices.

• We need to ensure that cities have functional property registration and information systems so they can plan growth and the services their populations need, and they can capture revenues from land rents and taxes.

• And we need to prevent weak and overlapping land rights in rural areas that are often a driver of conflict that contribute to population displacement and prevent the investments needed for significant growth.

At the World Bank, we are supporting government policies that recognize and record all forms of legitimate tenure, while:

• paying particular attention to the land rights of women and indigenous peoples, and

• supporting the strong land governance policies and institutions that can help prevent large-scale land acquisition or mitigate its negative impacts.

Let me now give you a few examples:

We are working in 48 countries, and have so far invested nearly a billion dollars in systems to help our clients protect, record, adjudicate, and register property rights.

Asli has already talked to you about the positive impacts that we have supported Rwanda to achieve.
• In Vietnam, the government issued 5 million land use certificates with the support of our Land Project, 60 percent of which were issued in the names of both the husband and wife. This has had real impact – land rights certificates held jointly increased the share of household women who were self-employed in agriculture by 5 percent, and reduced the incidence of poverty also by 5 percent.
• In Nicaragua, 1 million hectares of indigenous land were demarcated, titled, and registered, covering roughly 20 percent of the country’s territory;
• In Brazil, 55,000 poor rural families were given access to about 1.2 million hectares of land, and...
• Thanks to new geospatial technologies, in Albania and Kosovo we are using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or drones, to map and register property rights. And in FYR Macedonia, Russia, Vietnam we are establishing National Spatial Data Infrastructure to improve decision-making for investment and natural resource management.

In addition, at the global and regional levels, we are

• First, contributing to the development and implementation of the UN Committee for the World Food Security’s Voluntary Land Guidelines, or VGGT, and the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment;
• Second, supporting regional efforts, like the African Union’s Land Policy Initiative Framework and guidelines on land policy;
• Third, promoting detailed reviews on land governance, like the Land Governance Assessment Framework, or LGAF, which was discussed in detail here earlier today, and
• Fourth, as a founding member of the Global Donor Working Group on Land, we are implementing the VGGT, and more recently helping to secure agreements among member states to include two land indicators in SDG 1 and 5.
We know that this global drive to strengthen policy and invest in responsible land governance has increased awareness of the issues at the country level – which is good. But we know it will also require reaching out to civil society
  o to make sure the voices of all those affected are heard,
  o to hold decision-makers to account, and
  o to ensure policies are implemented and reviewed in a transparent way, as well as
And it will require reaching out to the private sector to help us develop responsible investments that are beneficial to all producers.

I know this conference is about Land and Governance, but the Bank is also looking to address land issues from other points of entry:

This includes, significant investments across all six regions in the areas of...

- land use planning,
- disaster risk management,
- climate smart agriculture,
- landscape restoration, and
- forest conservation and reforestation.

But despite all of these efforts, and those of many countries and partners, I’m sure everyone in this room would agree that we are still a long way from where we need to be.

Our vision is for a world where everyone has clear and secure property rights, where strong land governance systems support investment and economic growth and, where sustainable land use practices are the norm rather than the exception.

So, how do we get there?
First, we need to move toward more holistic, multi-sector partnerships with clients and development partners to more systematically address land and tenure challenges to achieve secure land rights for all by 2030.

Second, we need to coordinate more of what we do so that we are more strategic in our collective actions and ensure priority goes to activities with the highest returns. This will also help us also avoid duplication of efforts or avoid undermining each other. We are pleased with the work of the Global Donor Working Group on Land that is trying to ensure better coordination, better information flow, and better partnering at the local level and among our respective headquarters. The Chair of the Working Group this year – the US – has helped advance the agenda of this group; and next year, under French leadership, we hope to see further progress on coordination.

Third, we need more, better and transparent data at the country, regional and global levels. This will allow countries to benchmark progress and can create incentives for change. We also need to do more to build on new technologies; create new opportunities for land use and spatial analysis; and capitalize on more affordable high-resolution spatial data.

Finally, we need to build on the current momentum that is putting sustainability at the heart of the development process. We should use this opportunity to raise the profile and importance of secure land rights for poverty eradication, shared prosperity and sustainability.

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I had a quick look at the papers that will be presented over the next few days and at the participants list, and can see that there’s a huge amount of experience that’s present here. I’m sure that this group will be able to find new ideas and develop new approaches to tackle all of these challenges together.

We in the World Bank are honored that we can contribute to this global exchange of ideas.
So... welcome to you all, and I hope you have a fruitful conference.