



Land Watch Asia National Campaigns

Initiated in 2007 by the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), Land Watch Asia (LWA) is an NGO-initiated regional campaign geared towards ensuring that issues of access to land, agrarian reform, and equitable and sustainable development in rural areas are addressed in the national and regional development agenda. It maps the rural poor's access to land in the region by reviewing existing political and legal frameworks; initiatives and mechanisms for participation by various stakeholders in governance processes. It aims to contribute to existing country campaigns across Asia by identifying, through consensus building, the context, challenges and opportunities of access to land and agrarian reform campaigns at regional and national levels.

At the regional level, the campaign engages regional and intergovernmental institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Centre for Integrated Rural Development in Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) to influence policies on access to land that affect access to land of rural poor sectors.

At the national level, LWA focal points and partners in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines are doing policy advocacy, capacity building, networking and information sharing to help improve the poor's access to land. The following describes the country contexts on access to land and campaign updates under Land Watch Asia.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has elected a new President and Parliament that has retained its legitimacy, thus opening up potential spaces for CSOs to advocate for reforms. In 2009, the Land Watch campaign as led by country focal point Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), focused on developing educational materials to popularize land issues. ALRD and its network partners also conducted training activities on agrarian related policies with government agencies and CSOs. Specifically, they have worked on raising awareness of char dwellers on their land rights, as well as conducting activities to upscale small-scale farming through promotion of local seed varieties.



Source: ILC-Asia Photobank

ALRD also elevates the findings of its Land Watch country paper to regional and international levels. It provided inputs to CIRDAP's country study on agrarian reform and rural development, raising concerns and recommendations on improving tenure security, pro-poor and redistributive land reform, and the governance of land, water and forest resources, among others.

The campaign was able to score a significant victory in the 2008 parliamentary elections with land issues put into the election manifesto of the Awami League and Grand Alliance forces. Critical now is post-election follow-up for implementation of promises especially at policy level to improve land rights of the rural poor in Bangladesh. ALRD seeks to bring the campaign to climate change and its potential impact on coastal areas, follow-up of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord implementation and the Land Commission for IP lands, and establishing a law for IP lands.

Cambodia

STAR Kampuchea (SK), together with NGO Forum on Cambodia and other partner NGOs, implemented a one-year project titled "Land Issue Consultation in Cambodia" to engage the national government and international donor agencies working in Cambodia specifically on land issues: land grabbing, social land concessions and land conflicts. The project is set in an environment where the government's development agenda often comes at the expense of the poor. Moreover, because land issues in

Cambodia are deemed controversial, NGOs themselves are hesitant to advocate or dialogue with government because of their own security.

SK has conducted two training workshops to raise awareness of some 50 beneficiaries regarding their rights to land. The topics have ranged from land management, to legal parlance, social land concessions (SLC), and land registration. Through these workshops, SK has also been able to collect cases depicting the experiences of communities facing challenges in securing their rights to land.

The abridged version of the Cambodia country paper “Overcoming a Failure of Law and Political Will” has been already translated into Khmer and is being prepared for printing.

India

The Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD), with the South Asia Rural Reconstruction Association (SARRA) and Ekta Parishad jointly work on the Land Watch campaign in India, focusing efforts in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

AVARD, SARRA and EP have campaigned for the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006, a law that provides scope for enhancing access of the rural poor to forest land, and which has been enacted largely because of democratic pressure from civil society. The Ministers of each state have taken interest in the issue for priority action. In Madhya Pradesh, for instance, almost 10% of claims were accepted due to the high role of bureaucracy and pressure from CSOs.

AVARD has been working on the implementation of recommendations the Bihar Land Reforms Commission (BLRC) forwarded to the Bihar government. One recommendation was the time-bound distribution of *Bhoodan* land, and addressing issues that include the computerization of *Bhoodan* land records, restoration of possession of land awardees in cases of eviction, and support in making the awarded land productive. AVARD has been in active contact with the Chair of the Bihar *Bhoodan* Committee. Consequently, records in two districts have been computerized. Further, around 240,000 acres were distributed from 2007 to 2009 with major distribution of *Bhoodan* land in 2009. Ninety percent of beneficiaries in 2009 were women. Three of Bihar’s 38 districts, namely Muzzafarpur, Samastipur and West Champaran have been selected for land distribution on a priority basis.

The second recommendation was the allotment of homestead to the rural poor landless households under

the Privileged Persons Homestead Act, which is being pursued in collaboration with JSV and local NGOs.

Lastly, Land Watch members in India have engaged the National Land Reforms Council and Expert Committee on the state of agrarian relations, and more importantly, to complete hitherto unfinished tasks in land reforms. These two bodies were constituted to expedite land reforms, following democratic pressure by civil society NGOs through the Janadesh March in 2007.

Indonesia

The Consortium of Agrarian Reform (KPA) recorded at least 89 cases of agrarian conflicts covering some 133,000 hectares. The government has been intimidating activists working on solving agrarian conflicts – resorting to actions like torture and kidnapping. In this vein, KPA, together with Sajogyo Institute, the National Land Agency and Bogor University, initiated the “INFORM” project, which aims to pilot agrarian reform in 34 districts in Southern Java. Although only eight districts have been covered so far, the initiative has already strengthened the link between activists and the academe, as well as resulted in a direct and positive mode of engagement with government.

Directly responding to land cases and conflicts is a regular feature of Land Watch partners’ work in Indonesia. But beyond reactive work, partners like KPA and JKPP are proactively involved in mapping and community organizing, and specifically getting long term land leases for occupants and other dwellers in surrounding areas.

Nepal

The Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC) convenes the Land Watch Nepal campaign, working with the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) and its other alliance partners in the land rights movement to influence policy through dialogues at national and intergovernmental levels. CSRC was at the heart of the land rights lobby, coordinating the campaign of the National Land Rights Forum, which involved social movements and community-based organizations in 42 districts.

The victory of the People’s Movement in 2006 to install a democratic government has presented a highly significant opportunity for the land rights movement to influence Constituent Assembly (CA) members to prioritize the land reform agenda as they frame the new Constitution. Sustaining peace in Nepal requires secure rights to land for the poor farmers.

In view of this, the Land Watch national campaign has organized dialogues between CSOs and the CA to prioritize security of land tenure of the poor and marginalized sectors. It has also held discussions with the CA and the Natural Resource and Fundamental Rights Committees on the issue of landowner compensation for offering excess lands above the prescribed land ceiling. The Land Watch campaign has also organized dialogues with ADB, IFAD, the World Bank and other intergovernmental agencies, sharing policy positions on land reform and coordinating support for activities on improving tenure security, including the agrarian reform campaign. This has culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding between seven organizations for collective support the campaign.

The campaign has also established a platform of interaction between land rights and community forest-users movements, to formulate a more integrated position for implementing land reform and ensuring sustainable land use and resource management. Finally, it has expanded and strengthened the Land and Agricultural Rights Campaign to 50 districts; this has brought discussions from the community to national level.



Source: CSRC

In the next years, the campaign will continue ongoing policy advocacy, capacity development, and supporting agriculture cooperatives and land management activities, but plans to focus on pressuring and influencing the CA on land issues and policies, as well as working with the Land Commission and supporting the process of writing the People's Report to the Commission.

Philippines

The Land Watch Philippines campaign functions as an intersectoral platform for land issues of small landless farmers, IPs, forest users and fisherfolk. The campaign's greatest victory is the extension of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), with a new law passed and signed in August 2009. Land Watch Philippines member the People's Campaign for Agrarian Reform Network (AR Now!) led in the intense lobbying efforts

for the passage of Republic Act 9700 which provides the funding to extend CARP and make essential reforms to the existing Agrarian Reform Law. The new law breathed life to CARP's Land Acquisition and Distribution component, allowing the continued redistribution of some two million hectares of mostly private agricultural lands to identified beneficiaries.

The campaign has organized cross-sectoral discussions between IPs and farmers to tackle new policies affecting land reform implementation. For example, the 2nd Land Watch Conference was held last August, gathering representatives from the four sectors to discuss challenges to advocacy on land – the CARP extension with reforms (CARPER) law, land grabbing, land conflicts due to overlapping policies and confused mandates, the Alternative Mining Bill, and the National Land Use Act (NLUA) campaign. The Land Watch convenors have been assessing and rethinking strategies to push the passage of NLUA in the next Congress after the May 2010 elections.

A mechanism for the campaign to engage high-level stakeholders, the Philippine Development Forum (PDF) comprises government agencies and donors, and now CSOs, to discuss development priorities. ANGOC actively sits in the Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) working group and its sub-working groups on Land, Upland and Agribusiness. ANGOC brought in the Land Watch Philippines convenors, and collectively they have raised community issues and perspectives on agrarian reform, resource management, mining, and IP rights. Additionally, last May 2009, ANGOC, Land Watch Philippines and the PDF-SRD engaged the World Bank in a roundtable discussion on the Bank's study and positions on CARP.

The campaign's project on "Intensifying the common pursuit for land, justice and food security of IPs and Farmers in Mindoro and Bukidnon" has provided a forum for common advocacy of IP and support groups. Land Watch has helped convene dialogues between the Buhid Mangyans of Mindoro and DAR, which issued agrarian reform titles on the IPs' ancestral domain. The Manobos in Don Carlos, Bukidnon were unsuccessful in lobbying for their ancestral domain claim of 700 hectares of land within an estate distributed under CARP; they decided to take DAR's offer of settlement of 10 hectares of land for some 200 families. Support for the Manobos has consisted of food security and small livelihood projects, with Land Watch partners orienting them as CARP beneficiaries and following up on the processing of their CARP land titles. In sum, the project has enabled a stronger partnership between farmers and IP groups advocating for the land rights of Manobos in Bukidnon and Mangyans in Mindoro, while unraveling the policy complications from conflicting land laws.