

Road Map for ILC-Asia Towards Enhancing Women's Access and Control of Land

Introduction

In 25-26 October 2010, the Association for Land and Rural Development (ALRD) and the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) jointly organized the “*Regional Workshop on Women and Land Rights*” in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with the support of the International Land Coalition (ILC). Around 37 participants from NGOs, academe and social movements from seven Asian countries covering Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines shared their experiences, knowledge and analysis of women's struggles in pursuit of advancing land rights.¹

This document contains the consolidated reports of the South and Southeast Asia groups on the major challenges and proposed intervention – to inform ILC Asia's work plan for 2011 and beyond.

¹ Due to flight unavailability, a participant from Pakistan was not able to join the workshop. However, a powerpoint presentation was submitted and was presented by ALRD in Dhaka.

Rationale of ILC Asia's Involvement on Women's Land Rights

Gender inequality has long been a primary obstacle to development in Asia, where women, especially rural and indigenous women, are disproportionately poor. Women play many important roles – they ensure household food security, manage finances, take care of the family, participate in agriculture, and bear the brunt of household work, to name but a few. Yet the reality is that women's efforts are largely unpaid and unrecognized. Many women are not empowered. Also, according to studies conducted in South Asia, systemic bias prevails against women in terms of intra-household benefit sharing of male-controlled resources; and women without independent resources are highly vulnerable to poverty and destitution in case of desertion, divorce or widowhood. Indeed, the dominant patriarchal societies in many Asian countries, as reflected in its mindsets and attitudes towards women, do not uphold women as equal.

Opportunities for ILC to advance women's rights to land:

- ❑ International agreements on women's rights
- ❑ ILC's relations with some Asian governments and IGOs
- ❑ Country members and partners
- ❑ Establish link with UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples

Throughout the region, feminization of agriculture is a growing trend. Because of high outmigration of men, the number of women-headed households is increasing. Ensuring women's access to land would therefore be of utmost importance. However, women's access to land remains poor. When pro-women policies do exist, there is a yawning gap between them and their implementation. Women's land ownership is severely constrained. In many cases where women hold the land titles, ownership is not genuine and is merely nominal. Inheritance laws tend to favor men and are concretely biased against women. The customary land rights of indigenous women are unrecognized.

The challenges confronting women's access to land are formidable. Nonetheless, there exist several avenues for action advance women's land rights in Asia. For instance, many Governments have signed international agreements on women's rights – getting them to keep their commitments is one action. Moreover, CSOs lack the necessary capacity to adequately address women's issues. Developing capacity, especially on women's leadership, is a step closer to women's empowerment. Also, to deepen understanding of women's issues, highlight various local contexts, and bridge the knowledge gaps, more research has to be made through the documentation of cases. Finally, sharing positive lessons and experiences in working on women is encouraged.

Strategic Niche of ILC Asia

ILC Asia will contribute in addressing the complexities and major challenges CSOs face in advancing women's land rights. It will mainstream gender perspectives into its various areas of work.

ILC Asia, as a coalition, reaches out to the region through its country members and partners. It has established relations with some Asian governments and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) – and will serve as a bridge between them and its members and partners. It will help enable CSOs' advocacy on land to reach expanded audiences that include policy makers.

Proposed Interventions

ILC Asia should commit to mainstreaming gender in land rights programs and campaigns. The table found next page is a consolidation of the South and Southeast Asia groups' proposed action plans for the region. The activities mentioned will focus on development of women leadership in CSOs and in the bureaucracy; policy reforms favoring women's land rights and their enactment; the ratification of international commitments; the recognition of indigenous peoples' customary land rights; and the protection of women's land.

Ways of Working Together

An e-group will be created by ANGOC/ ILC Asia to stimulate discussions and foster better cooperation on work on women's rights.

Postscript

The outputs have been presented in the ILC Asia Regional Assembly. A priority theme for ILC Asia will be women. ■



Area for Action	Intervention (Country, Region)	Who	Outputs and Outcomes
Research	Country specific land research and documentation	ILC-Asia Country Members	Generated data and information required in advocacy
	Monitoring access to land using gender-disaggregated data	ILC-Asia Country Members	Monitoring reports, increased CSOs capacity in monitoring
	Documenting various land related movements, legal interventions and success stories	ILC-Asia Country Members	To strengthen the ongoing struggles
Advocacy Campaigns	Country-specific campaigns (e.g. Land Watch)	ILC-Asia Country Members	Gender equitable policies
	Women's Land Rights Day	South Asia	More visibility on women and land rights
	Footmarches	South Asia	Mass mobilization/contact
	Media campaign at regional and international levels	ILC-Asia members	Increased public awareness
Policy Dialogue and Knowledge Sharing	Different campaigns, e.g., signature campaign, cultural program, petition on-line	ILC-Asia	Mass mobilization/contact
	Regional summits, workshops or conferences	ILC-Asia members, other stakeholders from government, private companies, etc.	Regional interaction, increased knowledge of land issues
Capacity Building	Training programs	ILC-Asia members	Improved capacity of ILC members on research and advocacy
Network Building	Recruitment	ILC-Asia members	Expanded ILC-Asia network