

Introduction to the 2023 Land Watch Asia (LWA) Land and Resource Conflict Monitoring (LRCM) Report

Background

The United Nations Office of the High Commission on Human Rights reiterated in 2015 a universal truth that land is essential for the enjoyment of other rights, from shelter and food to human dignity and security. And as many people and communities attach their collective identity on the land, it also carries dearly held social, political and cultural rights.

It is unfortunate that many social conflicts are rooted in issues related to land and resource rights. This problem is recognized globally, as stated in the *UN Secretary General Guidance Note on Land and Conflict* released in 2019¹.

In Asia, land conflicts may be traced to enduring historical injustices, inequitable access to land and resources, faulty and weak implementation of past land and resource reforms, emergent clashes between statutory and customary tenure systems, misappropriation of State domains, and the lack of regard for human rights of the disadvantaged and vulnerable sectors (Quizon, 2018).

While a large portion of land and resource conflicts are due to government projects or corporate investments (i.e., mining, plantations, economic zones), many conflicts also occur when policies over the same parcels of land overlap or when laws are poorly implemented. Forms of structural land conflict include land grabbing, intrusion into indigenous peoples' lands, eviction of communities from large-scale infrastructure projects, and corporate takeover of common lands long used and managed by communities.

Land conflict is an indicator of our sad state of governance. Land conflicts result in loss of livelihoods, violations of human rights, loss of lives, and should thus signal an urgency for government and other stakeholders to act.

The Land Conflict Monitoring Initiative

The growth of land conflicts in number, coverage, and intensity in recent years have prompted CSOs to investigate them further. Thus, in 2013, the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) and Land Watch Asia (LWA) campaign incorporated land conflict in the

¹ In response to the increasing competition and conflict over land, the United Nations Secretary General developed a guidance note to help the UN system to achieve a sustained and strategic common approach to addressing the emerging needs of its Member States and population. See <https://gltn.net/download/the-united-nations-and-land-and-conflict-march-2019/?wpdmdl=14731&refresh=5e4b953a64c3f1582011706>

monitoring component of the campaign. In 2018, ANGOC and the Land Watch Asia (LWA) campaign produced country reports on land conflicts² in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines³. In particular, the studies discussed the nature and causes of land and resource conflicts, their impacts on local communities and land rights defenders, and action taken in response to them.

Recognizing that the use of different methodologies limited the scope for aggregation, comparison, and analysis of data at national and regional levels, participants developed common tools and a more systematic way to gather data and to report on land conflicts in 2020⁴.

Thus, the 2020 Land Conflict Monitoring Initiative implemented a *common yet flexible* system for collecting data and information on land conflicts. While the country and regional reports were prepared with the same objectives, methods were modified to suit focal organizations' capacities and country-specific objectives.

Moving forward, ANGOC and LWA members must continue to work closer together to refine the methods used. An overriding objective is the simplification of concepts and monitoring tools to make their use and the analysis of data easier. At the same time, efforts to expand country partners should continue in order to broaden the scope of monitoring initiatives rooted in community experiences.

2023 Land Conflict Monitoring Report

For 2023, ANGOC and LWA partners will continue this monitoring initiative building on the methodology used in 2020.

Country land conflict monitoring reports will be prepared to:

- describe the *prevalence and types* of land and natural resource conflicts;
- examine the *nature and causes* of land and resource conflicts;
- discuss the *human rights violations* on individuals and communities; and,
- draw up *recommendations* based on the study findings and consultations.

² In 2018, monitoring reports were prepared in six Asian countries to understand the nature, causes and impacts of land and resource conflicts and to highlight the human rights issues intertwined with them. See <https://angoc.org/portal/land-conflicts-in-six-asian-countries-portal-asian-ngo-coalition/>

³ KPA, a member of LWA has been conducting land conflict monitoring since early 2000. In 2014, ANGOC initiated the land conflict monitoring initiative in the Philippines.

⁴ The report can be accessed at <https://angoc.org/portal/in-defense-of-land-rights-a-monitoring-report-on-land-conflicts-in-six-asian-countries-vol-2/>