



## Asia Update

Throughout Asia, land is the main source of livelihood and employment among rural communities. Land reform initiatives have been developed in many Asian countries, but the implementation of these has generally been wanting because of corruption, changing political leadership and priorities, and a lack of political will. In most countries, even where reform efforts have been undertaken or are underway, there are significant sectors that do not benefit in these programs such as rural women, indigenous peoples' communities, and youth. Particularly in South Asia, the marginalization of women and Dalits is a key factor, as land access is often impeded by class/caste dynamics and gender discrimination; discrimination against indigenous peoples is also a concern throughout the region.

This section summarizes recent land-related developments and activities by ILC network members, focusing on six countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Philippines.

**Bangladesh** – Bangladesh is a predominantly an agricultural country where 42 percent of the population remain under the poverty line and 63 percent employed in the agricultural sector. Despite this, land-use policy is weak and does not reflect well whether those claiming land rights are dependent on agriculture or not. Campaigns to improve land access by the poor face problems of corruption, a lack of political will to implement laws, and competition for power between and among government agencies. While the government has committed itself certain international conventions, women, indigenous peoples and other minority groups remain largely excluded from land access.

In July 2007, the Association for Land Reform and Development (**ALRD**) and other partner organizations premiered the documentary film *Bhumi* (Land), which highlights the struggle of landless families to gain access to land, along with other basic rights. This film was broadcast on national television, as a means of raising public attention to the campaign for land rights by poor families and communities. ALRD is also working to influence national policy on women's land and property rights through policy dialogue and increase the capacity of its network members and partners to employ rights-based approaches in defending people's access to land. In public consultations held with indigenous peoples' communities in June 2007, participants demanded the formation of a separate land commission to focus on control over indigenous land and resources and to recover indigenous lands which had been lost previously in land grabs, as well as for respect of their constitutional rights. ALRD and its allies organized rallies to mark International Indigenous Peoples Day in August, to highlight these concerns over land and territorial rights.

In September 2007, ALRD conducted comparative studies in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and West Bengal. The programs in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka focused on practical and technical knowledge on community management of irrigation resources, with emphasis on access by women and indigenous peoples; in West Bengal, the program addressed the roles of local governments in regards to land reform

and management. In both, participants from the ALRD network and their Indian colleagues compared updates on the struggles for land, water and natural resources for sustainable development, including strategies for effective networking, across the two countries.

Marginal farmers, landless migrant workers and urban slum dwellers were among those hardest hit by recent flooding in Bangladesh. The Association for the Realization of Basic Needs (**ARBAN**), which had participated in past ARNET activities, has been working with poor families in both urban and rural areas affected by the floods, including support for land rehabilitation, accessing seeds and other agricultural inputs, and developing other income-generation activities.

**Cambodia** – Landlessness is becoming a more extreme problem in Cambodia, as the increased market demand for land coupled with exclusion from political and administrative processes increases the vulnerability of the poor. There is a high demand for land among the general population but this is not being met, as the market price for land is rising sharply, driven by land speculation and investments in agro-business, extractive industries and mega-projects. Corruption within the land administration process allows an opening for land grabbing, and especially threatening women-headed households and indigenous peoples' communities.

In response to the increasing prevalence of land conflicts and threats of landlessness among its local member organizations, the network **STAR Kampuchea** has continued work with four Provincial Advocacy Networks (PANs) of community-based associations in Kampong Cham, Pursat, Sihanoukville and Svay Rieng. These provincial networks are supporting community associations whose members face land and resource disputes to find ways to defend their rights through collective action and negotiation.

The number of member organizations involved in the networks has increased over the past year, reflecting both their increased capacities and the demand by communities for assistance in resolving land disputes. As a strong voice of civil society in the provinces, the networks were able to resolve natural resource conflicts in cooperation with the local, district and provincial government. Accordingly, the networks are increasingly addressed by communes and people who face serious land conflicts as well as by local authorities.

**India** – The demand for land rights by poor and landless communities increased in visibility in recent months, through the work of state-level and national campaigns. While laws exist to provide for access to land, tenure insecurity and landlessness has become a greater threat with the trend of special economic zones (SEZs) for commercial development, to which marginal and poor farmers are increasingly losing their lands. Thus far, 133 SEZs have been developed, leading to the acquisition of 48,000 hectares, with an additional 200-plus SEZs anticipated under the government's scheme. Social discrimination against Dalits, women and indigenous communities is also a key factor in generating landlessness and insecurity of people's rights to land and resources.

The Uttar Pradesh Land Alliance (**UPLA**) has emerged in India's most populated state to strengthen the ability of the state's land rights movement to address gender and caste discrimination. The UPLA began partnership activities with ILC in 2007, facilitated by the Social Development Foundation (**SDF**) which is a member of both UPLA and ILC. In March 2007, UPLA conducted its first in a series of Land Literacy workshops, in the eastern part of the state, and launched an extensive data collection

exercise throughout the state to assess the state of landless communities and inform an organizing manual. UPLA also facilitated direct action by poor and landless communities through the Padyatra campaign, in which a statewide foot march in June 2007 marched focus attention by the government and public on the challenge of poverty and its relation to land access and secure land rights.

In October 2007, the mass organization **Ekta Parishad** organized the national Janadesh campaign for people's land rights, mobilizing 25,000 persons, primarily poor and landless farmers from Dalit and indigenous communities in 11 states. Numerous organizations from other countries participated in the Janadesh, including CSRC from Nepal. In addition to raising public awareness about land rights movements, the campaign called for policy reforms such as regularization of indigenous lands, inheritance rights for women, and land distribution to the landless. ILC provided a letter of support to the Janadesh campaign, referencing the work of Ekta Parishad and UPLA, for delivery to the Indian Prime Minister along with other statements of solidarity. In late October, the Indian government announced it would form a National Land Reform Committee composed of government and civil society representatives, which has been one of the points which land rights movements have advocated for through their campaigns.

**Indonesia** – In late 2006, the Indonesian government announced plans for a land distribution initiative as part of national policy to support land reform and revitalization of the forestry and fisheries sectors. This marked the first state proposal to improve land access for poor families since the early 1960s, when then current Basic Agrarian Law was first passed. Since this announcement, national farmers' unions, NGOs and other civil society groups have stepped up their efforts to identify priority needs and influence government policy development, particularly with regards to this proposed initiative; the government, however, has yet to issue regulations that would define the specific terms of the land distribution, leading to some concerns that this window of opportunity may soon be lost.

The Consortium for Agrarian Reform (**KPA**) has continued its policy and advocacy efforts on two key issues: (a) the government's proposal for a land distribution scheme and (b) proposed national legislation on private investment that included provisions related to land rights. KPA has worked in alliance with other national CSOs to oppose legislation that threaten community land rights. As part of these activities, KPA also initiated a national training program for local farmer-leaders and land reform advocates, in partnership with other NGOs and farmer unions based in West Java. The Alliance of Agrarian Reform Movements (**AGRA**), a network of farmers' organizations, has also worked with its local chapters to assess the potential implications of the government's proposed initiative, and to strengthen efforts to gain negotiating leverage with local authorities for making land rights secure.

The Working Group on Forest Land Tenure (**WGT**), a working mechanism between the Department of Forestry and civil-society organizations, has continued its work to support tenure reform in forest areas – this is a key land access issue, as approximately 70 percent of Indonesia's land area is in practice managed via the forestry law framework. This year, the government issued new regulations recognizing forms of community-based forestry, in response to input by WGT and other organizations; WGT is now organizing policy study and discussion among civil-society networks concerning draft regulations governing customary forest rights.

Through the CEF program, the Indonesian Participatory Mapping Network (**JKPP**) supported community associations in Nanga Mahap sub-district, West Kalimantan province, to develop land-use planning documents for use at village and sub-district levels based on community-mapping activities. Having successfully engaged local government officials in this process, community associations are now working with JKPP to develop a proposal for district-level participatory mapping and land use planning as part of the official state planning process. The results and lessons from activities in Nanga Mahap have also contributed to a new training manual that JKPP and its partners will use in other parts of the country.

**Nepal** – Land ownership in Nepal is highly skewed, as landlords have better access in the corridors of power including the formulation of policies on land and food management. Tillers, meanwhile, remain in virtual bondage, receiving unfair wages and lacking access to basic services. Women, Dalits and ethnic minority communities in particular areas do not have ownership and control over resources, even where they are actively managing land.

In September 2007, in an effort to strengthen the land rights campaign and maintain pressure on political actors to improve access to land, the Community Self-Reliance Centre (**CSRC**) and other members of the National Land Rights Concern Group (**NLRCG**), a national CSO alliance that emerged last year, launched the Janayatra (People's March). This mass action brought together thousands of participants from rural communities, and culminated in a public forum that provided an opportunity for marchers to voice their demands for rights to land, water and forest resources, as well as a peaceful process to elect a new constituent assembly that could address land tenure and resource rights.

CSRC has continued to support community organizing around land rights at the district level, working with the National Land Rights Forum (**NLRF**), a national network of rural people's associations. This work, conducted in part through CSRC's involvement in the CEF program, has supported the formation and capacity-building of rural people's organizations, such as in land acquisition and management, strategic planning, civic participation and direct action. At the national level, CSRC and its partners have organized policy dialogues with the Ministry of Land Reform and Management and the National Parliament to address the conditions of landless and tenant farming communities. As a result of this work, a proposal for a high-level land reform commission reached the cabinet, though it remains pending because of the broader political situation. CSRC has also engaged the ADB on its planned land policy activities with the Nepalese government, resulting in changes to the program proposal to involve Nepalese organizations more closely and include greater focus on policy formulation process as opposed to only land survey and catastral system.

Mobilization and Development (**MODE**) has built on the past work of AR Net to update and document laws and regulations concerning land access, and compile a studies and events related to land rights, and land use and management. It is also producing a resource book on land and tenure systems and access to productive resources, and knowledge products on increasing land productivity. These are being communicated through various media, such as posters, pamphlets and newsletters, to increase the availability of information on the land rights context among organizations engaged in grassroots campaigns. MODE is also linking university students with local organizations

to support action research on land access, and link this to the review of laws, policies and strategies of poor and landless communities .

**Philippines** – As current state funding for the Philippines' national agrarian reform program, CARP, will end in 2008, much attention is focused on the legislative framework for land and agrarian reform in the country. While the government has signified intent to extend the land reform program, via a 10-year extension of its funding, it is also moving away from CARP's central mission of land acquisition and distribution as a means to resolve inequities in the rural Philippines. It is increasingly considering agribusiness as an alternative mechanism for land reform, with plans to open at least two million hectares of agricultural land to foreign and domestic investors.

This has compelled civil society organizations, church-based organizations and other religious groups, and development advocates to seek for the extension of the land reform program with the much-needed reforms in land acquisition and distribution, agrarian justice and productivity support. Within the land rights movement, there is debate over whether to renew CARP funding, but with more significant management and operational changes than are being proposed, or to support an alternative bill that would seek further-reaching reforms and targeted at breaking monopoly control over plantation lands. Meanwhile, some legislators have countered by proposing an extension of CARP that is more limited in terms of timeframe and funding level than even that of the government. Landlords have also taken to the counter-offensive, launching paid ads against CARP which misrepresent findings of past government studies.

In this context, civil-society networks and farmers' organizations have stepped up their efforts to mobilize members in support of agrarian reform, and to assess past experiences with CARP in order to inform their advocacy positions and tactics. The national network People's Campaign for Agrarian Reform (**ARNow!**) is documenting successful cases of land distribution, and linking improved tenure security with socio-economic impact of for participating families and communities, as a way of strengthening the argument for land and agrarian reform. ARNow! is organizing a roundtable forum on the CARP impact assessment studies and the role of agrarian reform in the economic growth of the country with pro-reform economists and business and church leaders .

Task Force Mapalad (**TFM**), a farmers' network that focuses its work in the country's Negros region, has intensified its land rights campaigns in regions where large tracts of agricultural land remain undistributed to poor farmers such as in Negros Occidental in central Philippines, and Davao and Bukidnon in southern Philippines. It has also participated in coalition initiatives within the agrarian reform community for legislative lobbying of the extension of CARP. It has continually linked community mobilization to dialogue, media work and advocacy to increase farmers' leverage in influencing government actions in favor of genuine land reform.

In October 2007, members of the farmers' association **PAKISAMA** took part in a Walk for Justice, a foot march from Mindanao to Manila organized by farmers from Sumilao municipality seeking to claim their rights to 144 hectares of land occupied by commercial interests. Although their rights to this land was recognized by the national government in 1990, repeated legal maneuvers and intimidation tactics have prevented them from claiming these rights for nearly two decades. A number of other civil society

organizations are supporting the farmers' march, including AR Now! which is facilitating their activities in the national capital region.

**Asia Regional** – In March 2008, the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (**ANGOC**) hosted a planning session for integrating campaign and monitoring work at the regional level, through a Land Watch campaign. Participants from six Asian countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines) took part, mainly from CSO/NGO networks and two from people's organizations (farmers and forest users associations). ILC members in Peru and Burkina Faso also participated, to exchange lessons and experiences from a comparative perspective with Asian colleagues.

In relation to implementing the initial phase of Land Watch, the planning meeting had the following objectives:

1. Identify and come to agreement on campaign outputs
2. Discuss and revise the framework and process for mapping campaign activities
3. Formulate country action plans and build a regional Land Watch platform.

Key outputs from the meeting, which this report will discuss further, included the following:

- Finalization of the content of and process for the formulation of country- and regional-level campaign mapping studies
- Identification of focal points for the campaign in six Asian countries
- Agreement to share regular updates on campaign activities, land policies, case studies and other relevant materials via an electronic platform
- Include special focus on the role of the Asian Development Bank by mapping institutional policies and programs related to land access and agrarian reform, and drafting case studies of specific projects in relation to access to land
- Consensus to organize a regional dialogue on these themes by 2008

Country-level work on the mapping studies has been taking place since May 2007, both for purpose of collecting information and encouraging discussions of land policy campaigns across CSO networks, NGOs and rural people's associations.

Among other initiatives by ILC members at the regional level, **IFAD** is continuing to develop its partnership with farmers and producers organizations in Asia, including support for policy dialogue on land and agrarian reform with regional institutions. This effort has grown out of the IFAD Farmers' Forum initiative, which encourages consultation and dialogue between small farmers and rural producers' organizations, IFAD and governments, focused on rural development and poverty reduction. In August 2007, **IFPRI** worked with the ADB to host a policy forum on rural development and poverty reduction in Asia, focusing on the role that agricultural and rural development plays in reducing poverty and hunger in a region that is predominantly rural.

In order to support closer collaboration among network members at the country and regional level, ILC is now piloting a decentralized planning, resource management and institutional representation in Asia. This is expected both to strengthen the ability of network members in Asia to influence land policy processes, and to inform the Council's consideration of decentralized operational models for ILC, as part of broader institutional change.