

Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP) Voices from the Field

“Women's Access to Land and Other Natural Resources in Indonesia” – a series of two workshops conducted with poor rural villagers in West Java

March 2002

Listening and Learning: Women's Access to Land and Other Natural Resources in Indonesia

“It is ironic that those who are the food producers, largely farm labourers, are among those most vulnerable to food insecurity. For the rural poor, secure access to land provides the most realistic opportunity for rural people to improve their livelihoods and develop assets that can improve their resilience to shocks.”¹

Introduction

How do the rural poor, and especially women, use and value land and other natural resources? How do they benefit from them? What processes of empowerment evolve when women's access to and control over these resources are increased and improved?

The Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP), a special programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty, set out to explore these issues in two of the three hamlets that make up the village of Malasari, in Bogor district, West Java. Although some of the households in the village own small parcels of land, always in the name of the husband, the overwhelming majority of families 'illegally' cultivate small parcels of state land that are managed by the *Perum Perhutani*, a state forest company operating in Central, East and West Java. This means that household access to land, the primary source of food and family well-being, is precarious. Moreover, the amount of land that they are able to cultivate is usually only enough to provide food for three months per year. As a result, most of the women must engage in other agriculture-related activities, primarily agricultural labour and sharecropping.

WRAP had no intention of conducting a formal analysis of land access, land ownership and tenure arrangements in Malasari. Rather, it sought to provide a forum for rural women there, whose lives are intimately linked to and dependent on the land around them. To do this, WRAP used the simple act of listening with empathy during a series of

¹ Ghimire, Krishna B. (ed.). *Whose Land? Civil Society Perspectives on Land Reform and Rural Poverty Reduction: Regional Experiences from Africa, Asia and Latin America*. Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and IFAD, 2001.

community workshops as these women spoke about their daily lives and what land means to them.

“Thank you for coming to speak to us and to listen to us. We feel recognized.” – Ibu Arti²

Such a community-level approach is not revolutionary, and it is certainly not new in Indonesia. At the same time, there has historically been a gap in the literature and knowledge base relating to how the rural poor, and especially women, use and value land. WRAP attempts to close this gap by giving voice to poor rural women in order to test and deepen our understanding of what land and other natural resources mean to them. After all, the perceptions and experiences of these women comprise their reality; and it is from their reality that they and their communities, together with the range of institutions that assist them, can discern and create opportunities. In essence, the focus of WRAP can be captured by three words that lie at the heart of the Popular Coalition's mission: *voice, visibility and opportunity*.

Before we share the perceptions and experiences of these women, however, it is important that we provide some basic information about Malasari and about the status of women who live there.

“To the memory of Andromeda, a devoted colleague, whose energy and commitment to improving the lives of poor rural women in Indonesia continue to guide and inspire us as we carry on her struggle in Asia and elsewhere.”

About WRAP

Launched in 2001, the Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP) is a specialized programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. It is funded through Japan's contribution to IFAD's Women in Development trust fund.

WRAP provides a tool for listening to and documenting the views and opinions of poor rural women on the value and importance of secure access to land and other natural resources. In this way, WRAP helps to raise international understanding, particularly among policy-makers, of the need to improve women's access to these resources. It also provides development practitioners with a rapid, effective and low-cost participatory tool for incorporating poor women's voices in project identification, design, implementation and evaluation.

The WRAP approach is built around a series of small community workshops that offer a forum for listening to the views and perceptions of poor community women on a range of selected resource-access issues. To create a suitable forum, WRAP keeps external participation to a minimum, and the workshops are held in the fields and forests in which

² All quotes in this document are from women who participated in one of the workshops conducted in Indonesia in March 2002.

the women work and not in the formal meeting sites that so often inhibit participants from speaking openly and candidly. Typically, WRAP community workshops take place over three days. The first two days are spent with the community women in their fields and forests. Experience has shown that moving between different locations and settings over the two days leads to richer discussions. The final day's meeting is best held away from the community. The aim is to review, summarize and synthesize the findings of the previous two days. Some women from the community should participate in this last meeting in order to validate, confirm or explain findings.

The WRAP process is driven by a local non-governmental organization (NGO) partner of the Popular Coalition. WRAP selects this partner on the basis of its strong links with communities in the area and its knowledge and understanding of the resource-access issues that affect the rural poor. The NGO is responsible *for* identifying communities and helping participants to understand the purpose and nature of the WRAP workshops. Typically, the first WRAP workshop is slightly larger than the following ones and may involve a limited number of external participants. In most cases, the national NGO partner organizes additional WRAP workshops in different communities in order to broaden and deepen understanding. The follow-up workshops are normally smaller in size and tend not to involve participants from outside the area. Where possible, the national NGO partner is encouraged to involve women from the earlier workshops in subsequent meetings.

WRAP is built on the same principle of active partnership that infuses all Popular Coalition activities. Community workshops involve a range of partners. Each partner contributes to the success of the process. These contributions include the time and knowledge of the community women themselves, the skills and experiences of local community-based civil-society organizations, the technical knowledge of government officials (where appropriate), and the knowledge, experience and reporting skills of different national and international civil-society and other organizations. The documentation process is based on the principle of open and transparent exchange, leading to outputs that reflect the contributions of all participants.

In 2001, nine WRAP workshops were held in Nepal and India. Two workshops were held in Indonesia in March 2002, and new workshops are planned for Cambodia and elsewhere in the region in 2002 and early 2003.

Methodological guidelines and additional WRAP documents are available from the Popular Coalition.

For further information about WRAP, contact Richard Trenchard at the Popular Coalition at: r.trenchard@ifad.org.

Women in Malasari³

The proverbial birds'-eye view is usually the best approach to gaining a summary understanding before beginning one's descent into the particulars. In Malasari, this approach can be difficult, at least from a visual point of view. Despite the very hilly terrain, the foliage in and around the village's three hamlets is so dense that finding an opening to the world below can be elusive. Green is the predominant colour and its textures vary, from the overarching, seemingly exaggerated leaves of the banana and palm trees to the soft and velvety strata produced by the terraced rice paddies. Indeed, the green is so intense, so pervasive, that a sense of burgeoning growth is the inescapable sensation. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the families who live amid such verdant splendour, and particularly the women who toil to produce such rich yields.

The abundant wealth of natural resources – forests and agricultural land – is almost entirely state land (a small portion is private land, covering both community and agricultural areas). According to 1997 data from the Department of Internal Affairs, the village covers 7 289 hectares (ha). However, a participatory mapping exercise undertaken by the Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment (RMI) in 1998 identified only 4 756 ha as village land. This report will use the latter figure as it reflects the perceptions of the villagers themselves. About 33.4% of the total area of 4 756 ha is assigned to the *Perum Perhutani* and 37.6% to a national forest reserve; a further 20.4% is used by a number of private tea plantations under license from the state. If one takes into account water bodies and residential areas, this means that about only 280 ha of land (less than 6%) is available for use by the farmers, including areas for homes and public facilities. Since, according to RMI, 1 432 households, or 6 269 people, rely on the land as their primary means of survival, a simple calculation reveals that each household has about 0.2 ha of land to cultivate. Clearly, this is insufficient, particularly if land is the primary source of food security and income.

There was a brief grace period when state-run gold-mining activities began near the village in 1992. Furthermore, during the Asian financial crisis in 1997, many of the village men began to mine for gold without obtaining permission from the state. The sudden and dramatic increase in income was used in many cases to upgrade homes and purchase vehicles. More often than not, however, the men used the money for leisure activities, and when the state imposed and enforced a ban on unauthorized mining two years later, the majority of villagers had little to show for it, with the exception of an occasional impressive house façade and a car or motorcycle parked nearby. Sadly, some villagers had even less: husbands had died in the extremely dangerous mines. With no money invested in such long-term concerns as savings or education, the village returned to its state of entrenched poverty.

³ The first WRAP workshop took place on 16 March 2002 in the central hamlet, also called Malasari. Approximately 25 women participated. The second workshop took place on 17 March 2002 in the hamlet of Nyungcung, where approximately 20 women attended. It is difficult to arrive at an exact figure since women arrived while the workshop was underway, and others had to leave early to tend to their fields or children.

Almost half of the population of Malasari are women. They play a much greater role than the men do in rice cultivation, which is the main agricultural activity. In fact, women play a much greater role in virtually all matters pertaining to land. When they are not tending to their children or to domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning, they are working the land. The land may be a hillside forest whose trees have been cleared by the *Perum Perhutani* and on which they have begun to cultivate rice, cassava, bananas and other staple food items, fully aware that their use of the land has no official recognition. Or the land can belong to a landowner to whom they provide *ngepak*, in which they work the landowner's rice field, earning two bundles of rice for each ten that they cultivate. As an alternative, they can earn about 7 000 rupiahs (USD 0.70) per day by performing agricultural labour, particularly weeding. Or they can sharecrop the land, usually land that belongs to another family member, turning over 50% of the harvest. Whichever combination the women resort to – and the majority have no choice but to undertake at least two of these activities – they are virtually living on and from the land. Access and control are insecure. And in the end, they still do not have enough food for their families.

Working in Partnership

WRAP is a programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. All of WRAP's activities are carried out with a range of national and international partners. The WRAP workshops that took place in 2002 in Indonesia involved the following partners:

Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty

The Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty was established in 1996. It is a global consortium of intergovernmental, civil-society and bilateral organizations with the specific mandate to empower the rural poor by improving their access to productive assets, including land and other natural resources.

For further information on the Popular Coalition and its programmes, contact Bruce Moore, Coordinator, at: b.moore@ifad.org.

International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFAD is a specialized agency of the United Nations. It was established in 1977 with a mandate to combat rural hunger and poverty in developing countries. The Fund's target groups are the poorest of the world's people: small farmers, the rural landless, nomadic pastoralists, artisanal fishermen and -women, indigenous people and, across all groups, poor rural women. In this context, IFAD provides direct funding and mobilizes additional resources for programmes designed specifically to enable the poor to overcome their poverty. This goal is built on the recognition that poverty reduction is not something that governments, development institutions or NGOs can do for the poor. They can forge partnerships and help to promote the conditions in which the poor can use their own skills and talents to work their way out of poverty.

For information on IFAD's programme in Asia, contact Phrang Roy, Director, Asia and the Pacific Division, at: p.roy@ifad.org.

The Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment (RMI)

Founded in 1992, RMI is a non-profit organization that aims to promote natural resource conservation in Indonesia by conducting research and field action-programmes related to the protection, preservation and use of natural resources for community prosperity. It promotes participatory, community-based natural resource management and environmental education programmes.

For further information on the involvement of RMI with WRAP, contact Ulfa Hidayati at: rmi@bogor.wasantara.net.id.

For further information about RMI, contact Latipah Hendarti, Executive Director, at: rmi@bogor.wasantara.net.id.

Consortium for Agrarian Reform (KPA)

Founded in 1995, the Consortium for Agrarian Reform is a nationwide consortium of NGOs that aims to promote agrarian reform in Indonesia by amplifying the voices of local people on issues of their land rights. It creates and enhances links between the local knowledge produced by the collective action of communities and government policy-making processes.

For further information on the activities of KPA, contact Noer Fauzi at: kpa@kpa.or.id

Social Development Foundation (SDF)

SDF links activists and NGOs working to defend and strengthen the land rights of dalits and tribals in Uttar Pradesh and surrounding areas of India. It is involved community-based activities directed at increasing the capacity of marginalized communities to understand their rights and to make effective demands for them at local, regional and national levels. SDF has initiated training programmes such as land-literacy workshops in various parts of Uttar Pradesh. Since 1998, SDF has also been one of the Popular Coalition's national nodes in India as part of its Agrarian Reform Knowledge Network (ARnet). In this role, SDF aims to create a rural information resource centre to help its partners and other grass-roots community-based organizations to acquire knowledge and create links with other national and international initiatives.

For further information about SDF, contact VB Rawat, Director, at: vbrawat@vsnl.com

Mobilization and Development - Nepal

A local development NGO, Mobilization and Development-Nepal (Mode-Nepal) focuses its overall development efforts on bottom-up, integrated actions, primarily through awareness-building, to promote education, employment, health, sanitation and participation in self-help activities. It endeavours to adopt and institutionalize a holistic and participatory approach that involves individuals, their grass-roots organizations and the Government in enhancing the quality of life and sustainable development of the country. Since 1998, Mode-Nepal has also been the national node for the Popular Coalition's Agrarian Reform Knowledge Network (ARnet).

For information on Mode-Nepal, contact Bharat Shrestha, Director, at: mode@mail.com.np

Brett Shapiro

Brett Shapiro is a writer and editorial consultant specializing in international humanitarian and development assistance. Since 1993, he has been collaborating with the three United Nations agencies based in Rome, where he currently lives, and has published a wide variety of reports, advocacy pieces and policy papers on issues related to rural poverty in developing countries.

For further information, contact Brett Shapiro at: cdbrets@flashnet.it.

Listening and Learning

“I am about 90 years old and have lived here all my life. I am the fifth-generation village elder. We have always been women. What are the biggest problems in the village? Lack of food, lack of land.” – Ibu Uun

The sites chosen for the two workshops are a one-hour climb by foot from the hamlets, the same steep and rocky route that the women take each morning to arrive at the parcels of land that they work. Each opens onto the summit of the hill, where the forest has been cleared and the fields are in various stages of cultivation.

The men are mounting a large blue tarpaulin atop wooden stakes to provide shade from the sun, whose scorching potential can already be felt as early as 7.00 hours. Most of the women have already arrived. The staff of RMI, a local NGO that they know and trust, has contacted them in advance, told them about the workshop and encouraged them to participate. The women are preparing breakfast, which they lay out on the grass under the makeshift tent, each parcel of food carefully wrapped in banana leaves and tied with stalks as if it were a gift for each participant.

When the men have finished setting up the tent, they recede but do not disappear. The women seat themselves under the tent on banana leaves that have been arranged in rows to protect them from the wet earth. The men and children stand around the perimeter. Undoubtedly, they are curious to see what this ‘women only’ gathering is all about. In time, all but one or two of the men will return to their work or to the village, enabling the women to have a better opportunity to speak freely.

Sitting under a makeshift tent surrounded by rice paddies – this is a typical workshop ‘venue’. There are no microphones, no round tables, no flip charts with coloured markers and no computers. In fact, the setting is always outdoors, in forests, in the fields that the women (rarely) own, sharecrop or work for a meagre daily wage. Later, discussion will take place individually, with women whose eagerness pleads for just a little more time, or with women who are working in the fields that we pass as we return to the village. In these natural settings, the lives and resources that are being spoken about and the changes that are – or are not – taking place, become more palpable.

After several hours of listening, talking and observing, themes begin to emerge. Some surface again and again, introduced by one participant and eagerly elaborated by another, and then another. Other themes are brought up by a lone voice, but one so emphatic that it cannot be discounted.

What do these women have to say? What do they want to share with us about the importance of land to them?

“I am 13 years old and Ibu Uun is my grandmother. I know what the biggest problem is. That’s easy – land and hunger.” – Yeti

A Day in the Life

Ibu Lia is 22 years old. She married at 18 and has twin boys who are almost 2½ years old. She wakes up each morning at 4.30 hours to wash and pray, after which she begins to prepare breakfast and do the laundry. Her husband takes care of the children during this time. “The men never help with the household chores,” she explains. At 5.30, her husband goes off to do agricultural labour in a neighbour’s field, and an hour later she goes to the paddy field, leaving her children in the care of her mother. Her husband works until 15.00 and is paid 15 000 rupiahs (USD 1.50), or 10 000 rupiahs (USD 1) if he does not provide his own lunch. He turns the money over to her to manage. “It is normal that women manage the money,” Lia says.

At noon, Lia returns from the field. She washes, says her noon prayers and prepares dinner, which the family will eat at about 17.00 hours. After she completes the dinner preparations, she continues to clean the house until shortly before the evening prayer at 18.00. “My husband and I realized that the twins were a lot to cope with for now, so we decided to use the family planning offered. I am given a birth control injection every three months. Since I do not menstruate, I can pray every day.” Lia also mentioned that the family often does not have enough food to eat.

Lia does not do agricultural labour. She explains, “When women do labour, they earn much less than men do, sometimes as little as 6 000 rupiahs (USD 0.60) for a day’s work.”

Listening and Learning Food Security

“If there is no land, there is no food. If there is little land, there is little food.” – Ibu Ninar

It has been said that when there is not enough to eat, all other concerns are relegated to the background. This is the case with the women in Malasari. They are responsible for providing food for their families, and they do so by working the land. Despite the long hours they spend working the land, in most cases the small plots that they cultivate do not provide enough food for an average family. Most of the women said that their fields yield enough food for only three months. To supplement their own food production, some of the women, and many of their husbands, work the fields of landowners, for which the men are paid about 15 000 rupiahs (USD 1.50) for a day’s work and the women between 6 000 and 12 000 rupiahs (USD 0.60-1.20). Other women engage in sharecropping, typically keeping 50% of the harvest. When all is said and done, however, the food supply often still does not meet the families’ yearly requirements. Moreover, the women tend not eat with their families. Rather, they have their meal after their husbands and children have eaten. This usually means that the women have an even more limited quantity and often a lower quality of food.

“I have six children, five daughters and one married son. I have one *gedeng*’s worth of land that I cultivate on the hill. The last harvest yielded 30 bunches of rice. I also have two *gedengs* of land for wet harvesting. I get 50 bunches from this harvest, but I had to give 18 bunches to the forest company, which controls the land and gets six bunches for every *gedeng*. This means that I have less than 80 bunches to feed my family. It is not nearly enough. And the land is not nearly enough.” – Ibu Arti

The women described the land they worked in terms of ‘*gedengs*’ and ‘bunches’ rather than hectares and kilograms (kg). One *gedeng* is equivalent to the area of land that can be planted by a single 7.5 kg bag of rice, approximately 0.1 ha of land. A *gedeng* can yield between 30 and 40 bunches of rice. One bunch of rice is sufficient for a family of six for two days. None of the participants cultivated more than 0.5 ha of land, and many, like Ibu Arti, cultivated far less. In the case of Ibu Arti, the rice that she brings home from the land that she cultivates will feed her family for about four months. If she has two harvests in a year, she will have enough rice for eight months. What about the other four?

“I sell kitchen implements that are made from bamboo by a man I know. I am a kind of trader for him and I earn 15 000 rupiahs (USD 1.50) a week.” – Ibu Manarsi

“Sometimes I sell jackfruit to a middleman who comes to the village. I sell them to him for 500 rupiahs (USD 0.05) each, even though I know that in some markets just a slice of the fruit could fetch 10 000 rupiahs (USD 1). But I can’t get to the market. To get a car to take me to the market would cost 50 000 rupiahs (USD 5).”—Ibu Sani

There was a noticeable absence of young girls working in the fields. The women explained that some of their daughters bring in additional income by going to nearby towns to do housekeeping. Several of the women spoke about young women and girls being sent off to other countries as migrant labourers.

About half of the participants at the second day’s workshop owned goats, typically three or four. The women decide when to sell and they also set the price, generally 200 000 rupiahs (USD 20) for small goats and 300 000 rupiahs (USD 30) for larger ones. The money earned is used for food, clothing and other essential items for the house and the family. It is also used to pay for weddings, especially those of sons, as local tradition dictates that the groom must offer 500 000 rupiahs (USD 50) to the bride’s family at the time of marriage. In some cases, families will share the raising of the goats with other households and share the income earned accordingly. And all village members share in collecting grasses for their goats and fuel wood for cooking. Grasses are collected daily, while fuel wood is collected once or twice a week.

“I never sell the paddy that I cultivate. It’s not enough even for my family.”—Ibu Ati

Husbands will sometimes be engaged in non-farming activities, if such activities are to be found. One example is the hillside extraction of bentonite rock (which has wide-ranging applications, including oil refining, animal feed and foundry construction), for which the men receive a meagre 5 500 rupiahs (USD 0.55) for every half tonne that they extract.

Whatever non-farming income-earning opportunities may arise, it is almost always the men who engage in them. Women's lives instead are about the land, and they are intimately linked to it. With the exception of the two women quoted above, the participants showed little awareness of, or interest in, engaging in such activities.

“My husband and I cleared and dug a half acre of forest land that the *Perum Perhutani* had cut. I worked very hard to plant paddy, cassava, bananas and other food. I couldn't take more land because my older children are married and live in another sub-district, and I have limited energy. I couldn't manage more land.” – Ibu Sannah

The crops that the women cultivate are mainly staple items for household consumption – rice, bananas and cassava. Since local tradition prevents them from going to the rice fields on Mondays and Fridays, on those days the women take care of the dry-cultivation land and gardens that they may have in order to cultivate roots (such as sweet potatoes), vegetables and fruit. The women rarely introduce new types of crops into their fields: as many explained, to do so would require technical skills that they lack, credit that they do not have and inputs, such as fertilizer and tools, that they simply cannot afford. For this reason, most of the women continue to plant very low-yielding, traditional rice varieties, even though they know that high-yielding commercial varieties would reduce their household food problems. (Many women also complained about the taste and texture of these newer and non-traditional high-yielding varieties.)

“I have less than a quarter hectare of land. I plant cassava, bananas and other fruits and vegetables. My husband works as an agricultural labourer and gets rice. This helps with the rice paddy that I cultivate, which is less than 100 square meters and which unfortunately was just recently attacked by birds. We don't make enough for our three children and us. That is why my husband works. But he can't find work every month, so it can be very, very hard.” – Ibu Iis

Listening and Learning Prospects for the Future

“First and foremost, I need land to plant paddy and other crops to support the daily needs of my family. But even if I made enough money by working on a plantation, I still need my own land for savings, for my future. I have no land, I have no money. That's what being poor means to me.” – Ibu Iis

The day-to-day insecurity of these women in terms of having enough to eat is compounded by their sense of insecurity regarding the future. Not only does the land not produce enough food to ensure household food security, but also their right to use much of the land that they cultivate is not legally recognized. With the exception of very few households, the land that they work is state land controlled by the *Perum Perhutani*, and it cannot – legally – be used for agricultural production. Their use of it is certainly insecure, and in many cases highly tenuous.

“The small amount of land that I cultivate was also cultivated by my parents before Independence in 1945. But it is not recognized as mine. Two years ago, a field officer from the forest company showed up on the land and asked me not to plant. I still planted it though. I told them that I needed to use this land for my food, for my family. They didn’t answer me. So far, they haven’t come back. But I am afraid that one day they will come back.” – Ibu Ati

The experience of Ibu Ati is not unusual. She is using land that her family has cultivated for over 50 years. But she has no legal title, meaning that she has no rights and no long-term security. Many women had similar stories to tell of the *Perum Perhutani* turning a ‘blind eye’, only to reappear at harvest time to collect on average six bunches of rice for every 30-40 bunches that the women harvest.

“If there is no land, there is no food. If the land were mine, I could grow what I wanted on it. As it is, the *Perum Perhutani* tells us what we can plant.” – anonymous

This insecure tenure relationship on *Perum Perhutani* land does not bode well for the future economic security of the villagers, especially the women. It is virtually impossible for them to consider alternative land uses that could perhaps provide them with longer-term benefits. For example, the local *Perum Perhutani* often determines the tree species that they can grow, forbidding the planting of other species that are better suited to the sustainable production of timber – which they could use, for example, to improve or rebuild their houses. They are also not allowed to grow certain fruit trees, which could provide cash income.

At best, a few of the women have tax receipts showing that they have paid taxes on the land that they have farmed. While the receipt shows that they use the land, and details how much land they use and for how long they have used it, it is not a formal land title and therefore provides no legal security. And of course, in these few instances, the tax receipt is in the name of the husband.

“I would prefer having a small bit of land that is my own. It is more secure. Nobody could take it from me. Even though that hasn’t happened, I’m always worried that this could change in the future. Maybe even tomorrow.” –Ibu Anah

Listening and Learning Education for the Children

“It’s not that we don’t want our children to have an education. It’s that we cannot afford it.” – Ibu Mala

The three hamlets that comprise Malasari each have a primary school for children 7-12 years of age. Most of the women were proud to say that their children attended primary school. They place extremely high value on the education of their children, both sons and daughters. At the same time, many of the women fear that their desire for their children to go beyond primary school could remain a dream.

“The higher education fees have always been well beyond our means. But now, even the primary school registration fees are high. The situation is becoming more and more difficult.” – Ibu Manarsi

There are no secondary schools in Malasari. The Government’s national educational programme does provide for an ‘open school’ in each village that does not have a secondary school. Malasari has two open schools, in Malasari and in Nyungcung. The open school system provides the children with books for self-study. The children meet two or three times a week with a voluntary teacher who comes to the village. In reality, book distribution is extremely limited.

“I am about 90 years old. I have no formal education. I grew up learning the Islamic religion, and that is all. When I was young, there was no school.” – Ibu Uun, the village elder

“When I grow up, I want to be a doctor.” – Yeti, her 13-year-old granddaughter

Many women also hoped that their children would attend the Islamic boarding school; yet no woman knew of any child who had ever attended. Although the majority of the women themselves had attended the village primary school, as adults they are struggling to make a living. They have great hopes for their children, but fear that their destinies will not be very different from their own.

“I graduated from primary school. I don’t have money. I have three boys, ages 17, 12 and six. The elder two are in school. Will they have enough money?” – Ibu Iis

Listening and Learning Material Benefits

“Please forgive me for the simplicity of my home. I am so sorry.” – Ibu Uun, the village elder

The majority of homes in Malasari are made of wood, palm fibre and plaited palm leaves. These homes are a clear indicator of the economic conditions in which the villagers live. Occasionally, a very different kind of home can be seen, one with a brick or cement façade, glass windows, and a ceramic roof, patio and floor. These homes were built during the Malasari ‘gold rush’ of 1997-99, and they are a source of great pride for their owners. One cannot help but wonder how these homes will be maintained over the years: when the government banned the villagers from extracting gold, the newly found income came to an abrupt halt.

The prestige and sense of self-esteem conferred by having a handsome dwelling and a vehicle is not an unusual phenomenon, and Malasari is no exception. When venturing beyond the persistent need for food on a daily basis, the women spoke about homes,

particularly about their frustration at not being able to have a larger home or a vehicle with which to move about. Many of the homes consist of two rooms and a rudimentary bathroom and kitchen, with no toilet facilities. And the average family consists of five to seven people.

“If I had my own land, I could cultivate a garden and grow fast-growing trees for timber, which I could sell or use to improve my home. I could also grow other crops, which I could sell in the village for cash.” – Ibu Anni

“Land is important because it would give me money to go to Mecca.” – Ibu Manarsi

The women also spoke about jewellery and make-up, which, in the Sundanese society of West Java, also confer status and represent two of the few items that women purchase for themselves. In addition, many of the women expressed the longing to fulfil one of the five pillars of Islam – to make a pilgrimage to Mecca sometime during their lives. In addition to the religious dimension, in Sundanese society making a pilgrimage to Mecca greatly enhances social status. Many Sundanese families will actually sell a parcel of land in order to pay for the pilgrimage and for the festivities that precede and follow it.

“Our husbands prefer employment. We prefer to have land.” – Ibu Tuti

For these women, the possibility of fulfilling their essential needs and modest dreams can be found only in the land, whether it means having more of it, having legal or secure access to it, or learning how to use it better. For them, it is the land that can yield the greatest benefits.

A Final Word

The women whose words are reported in the preceding pages were asked to provide reasons why land is important. “What do you want to tell people in other countries about why poor rural women should be given secure access to land and other natural resources?” It is clear that in a short time, a group of WRAP ‘outsiders’ cannot fully understand and capture all of the opinions and perceptions of village women. At the same time, the group believes that the statements of the women themselves reflect to a significant degree the perceptions of a larger whole, especially in highlighting how important access to land is for women, their households and the communities in which they live.

As talking to these women has shown us, giving them secure access to land is the basis for transforming their lives. In economic terms, it can ensure that they have enough food on their tables, give them a more secure source of income and create opportunities for new ways of making money for their households. All of the women with land displayed a clear sense of security about their future and that of their families. This is not to say that they perceived land as a panacea. As Ibu Mala pointed out, “If I had more land, that would be wonderful. But I would also need more money and labour to be able to manage it. I have no idea where that would come from.” Rather, they saw land as the springboard

for their economic, educational, personal and spiritual growth and well-being. None of the women expressed an alternative to having land as a means for lifting themselves out of poverty. Their devotion to their families and to the land on which they live was unflinching.

We must remember that most of the land that the women use is state land controlled by the *Perum Perhutani*. Women's access is therefore insecure, and the families have no legal rights or protection and no guarantees regarding the future use of the land. One consequence is that, since the people are forced to cultivate in this 'legal vacuum', it is very difficult for them to receive technical support and assistance that could help them – for example, to increase their yields, manage their land more sustainably, explore opportunities for agro-forestry or adopt new technologies and other new practices. In this situation, then, tenure security would also provide a vital platform for future assistance and development.

We were also reminded of a simple but crucial lesson: talking to poor households, and in particular women, listening to their views and perceptions, and learning from their knowledge provide valuable insights that cannot be gained elsewhere. In documenting the voices of poor Indonesian women, we hope that what they have to say is given attention and respect, and that their observations and insights are used to fuel our efforts to help create the conditions under which the poor can lift themselves out of poverty.

“We have defended our land before, and we will defend it again.” – Ibu Uun, the village elder

WRAP is an expanding programme. If you would like further information on the programme, or should you wish to become involved, or even organize community workshops using WRAP approaches, please feel free to contact Richard Trenchard at the Popular Coalition at: r.trenchard@ifad.org