



News & Notes

*A Newsletter for Friends & Colleagues
of the Rural Development Institute*

In this issue:

August 2010



Join us for RDI's Photography Show: Lens on the Land
[Read more](#)



Focus on the Fields: India
[Read more](#)



Conflict Resolution along Kyrgyz-Tajik border
[Read more](#)



New Publication
[Read more](#)

Join us for RDI's Photography Show: Lens on the Land

A second night has been added!

For those of you located in the Pacific Northwest, RDI invites you to an evening of wine, photography, and inspiration.

After receiving an overwhelming response to our initial invitation for September 8th, we've scheduled a second reception for *Lens on the Land*, to be held on Friday, September 10th, from 4:30 to 6:30 pm.

This powerful show features RDI attorney Deborah Espinosa's photographs from her fieldwork in India and Africa, paired with informative captions about land rights around the world. The exhibition will be on display through September 25 at ArtXchange Gallery, 512 1st Avenue S., Seattle. We invite you to come, bring a friend, and be inspired. The event is free and open to the public. Please RSVP to Jason Miller at jasonm@rdiland.org or 206-458-6119.



TOP

Focus on the Fields: India

RDI's India staff is making great progress in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where officials have, with RDI's input, rewritten the laws regulating the leasing of farmland.

Currently, leasing farmland is either illegal or greatly restricted in most states in India. Nevertheless, about half of the country's farmland is under informal lease agreements. Research shows that the restrictive tenancy legislation both reduces agricultural efficiency and restricts land access for the poor.

A new law protecting both landlords and farmers is in everyone's interest. It can allow poor farmers, who have managed to accumulate some savings, to rent land legally and escape from exploitative tenant-farmer relationships. This legal change could potentially impact hundreds of thousands of poor farmers and become a model for other states interested in reforming their land leasing laws. The new law, already approved by the State cabinet, will make it legal for poor women and their families to lease agricultural land for 5-year terms.



Our Seattle team has also been working in India. This month, Renee Giovarelli, Director of RDI's Global Center for Women's Land Rights, traveled to Kolkata, India, to join the West Bengal team in our innovative new program, "Security for Girls Through Land." The program aims to help landless girls in rural India avoid child marriage, trafficking, and other exploitation.

RDI's approach is based on the power of secure land rights to transform lives. In this initial pilot program, RDI will identify 2,500 poor landless families who have at least one daughter and no sons. Each of these families lives in poverty and faces the additional burden of paying dowry to marry their daughter(s). Historically, these families have had two choices: to send their daughter away to the city to earn her own dowry, or to marry her off at a very young age, since dowry is reduced or sometimes eliminated for a young girl. In the case of very young girls, their families can sometimes receive a payment for her if they offer her for marriage early enough. This practice is sometimes a guise for trafficking, and the entire system makes girls vulnerable to abuse and

exploitation.

The new program, which is being developed by the State of West Bengal and RDI for future scaling, offers these families another option: to provide daughters with land rights and to protect those rights by changing the community's thinking about the role of girls, inheritance practices, and the tradition of dowry. Each family will receive a micro-plot, and the boys and girls will be enrolled in self-help groups, where they will be able to have frank discussions about their communities' values and the consequences of those values. In addition, girls will receive vocational training, providing them with the ability to learn income-generating activities on their families' micro-plots. Others in the village will participate in intensive community conversations, which have been used successfully to address other sensitive topics like HIV/AIDS and female genital mutilation. We'll be providing you with updates as this exciting new program progresses..

RDI's work in India comes at a time when there is increased awareness of the plight of the rural poor in India. As many of you already know, India has an estimated 15 million poor and landless rural families and tens of millions more poor rural families who don't have secure access to the land they currently occupy. Their plight has come to the forefront recently with increasing demands from several quarters for land rights. These demands have taken a variety of shapes, from peaceful marches across the country to violent protests. In 2007, 25,000 people marched for a month across India to campaign for improved land rights. Organizers of a charity called Ekta Parshad, are now planning another march for 2012 that will include 100,000 protestors. Additionally, an Indian Maoist group that focuses, in part, on land rights, led a violent attack in April that left more than 70 people dead.

TOP

RDI in Central Asia

RDI's work along the Tajik and Kyrgyz border to minimize conflict between ethnic Tajiks and Kyrgyz over contested pasture land is progressing well.

One of the activities that we are overseeing as part of this project is a micro-grant program, where local people design and present a project aimed at integrating the two communities and reducing tensions. Both local communities voted on the proposals and the top 14 projects will be funded and administered by RDF, our local partner. The projects included a gym to be shared by both Tajik and Kyrgyz youth, a sewing group for Tajik and Kyrgyz women, and a program to improve environmental stewardship in both communities.



The importance of our work here was illustrated by the recent ethnic violence that consumed large portions of southern Kyrgyzstan in June of this year. The violence displaced more than 100,000 people.

TOP

New Publication

Land grabs, biofuels, carbon trading, and special economic zones have increased pressure on land in developing countries in a number of ways and will undermine the position of poor farmers in the developing world, if left unchecked.

RDI attorneys Keliang Zhu and Darryl Vhugen and former RDI Research Assistant Nathan Hilgendorf have taken an in depth look at one of these factors – carbon trading – and assessed its potential impact on farmers in China.

The article, “*Who Owns the Carbon in Rural China? An Analysis of the Legal Regime and Practices with Preliminary Policy Recommendations*,” published jointly by the Rights and Resources Initiative and RDI, explains that to ensure the long-term success of China’s forest conservation and carbon emission reduction efforts while addressing the welfare of the affected rural poor, it is essential for China to continue its land reform efforts. These land reform efforts solidify farmer’s control over their land and require compensation when those lands are taken. Most importantly, the authors argue that the security of farmers’ rights over forestland and trees should continue to be bolstered and adequate compensatory regimes established for farmers affected by carbon sequestration programs. The stakes are high. China is home to more than 195 million hectares of forestland. The value of these resources, both monetary and environmental, cannot be overstated. Farmer’s claims to these resources need to be acknowledged and protected.



You can read the study in its entirety on our website: http://www.rdiland.org/publications/type/rdi_reports/