2012 Asia Land Forum

Democratizing Governance on Land towards Enhanced Access of the Poor to Land and Common Property Resources

Communiqué

From October 2-3, 2012, 100 participants from 12 countries convened at the Imperial Garden Villa and Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia to discuss and build collective action on responsible land governance, engaging active citizenship and governments.

The forum acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the participation of government representatives from Cambodia, Laos, Nepal and the Philippines and recognized their efforts for working towards more responsible land governance systems.

Participants highlighted the approval of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security by 193 countries represented in the Committee on Food Security (approved on May 11, 2012). These Voluntary Guidelines provide an international framework for responsible land governance, and make an urgent call for action.

The two days of discussion highlighted the enormous impact of large scale land acquisitions in Asia. National interests are being overpowered by regional and global economic interests. National land use plans express the sovereign interests of a country to protect and manage its natural resources. Participants noted that in Cambodia, thousands of hectares in economic land concessions (ELCs) are given to foreign corporations in ways that displace poor farmers and slum dwellers.

Efficient land markets and administrations may work in favor of the rural poor, but they can also lead to greater land concentration for those with power and capital. The distortion generated by corruption in the land sector is alarming.

Although titling and administration represent important components of land governance, these should be seen in the broader context of ensuring social and political rights for citizens, as well as transparency and accountability of governments and other institutions.

The participants called on all regional governmental organizations, including state leaders who will be meeting in Phnom Penh for the 21st ASEAN Summit from November 15-20, 2012, to adopt the vision embedded in the Voluntary Guidelines to develop a regional framework embodying these principles.

Land disputes in the region are increasing, while evictions, displacement and violation of individual and collective human rights are on the rise.
The forum highlighted the erosion of small farmer agriculture. Asia is home to 75 percent of the world’s farming households, 80 percent of whom are small scale producers, yet a majority are poor and lack security of tenure to land and resources. Moreover, their agricultural lands are being converted to other uses, such as mining or transformation into urban environments. Smallholders living in the commons in many Asian countries face eviction from the forests and the landscapes in which they reside, as governments formalize land use planning systems that fail to recognize traditional and informal systems.

The forum stressed the importance of encouraging responsible investment from the private sector as well as building governmental capacities to responsibly govern land, water and forestry. Working together globally and nationally to influence the regional perspective for a better future will be the aim of our actions.

Seventy percent of the world’s 370 million indigenous people live in Asia. Securing the collective land, cultural and water rights of indigenous communities will enable them to continue to serve as custodians of the collective patrimony of biodiversity, a responsibility recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international agreements.

Participants unanimously reaffirmed the equal rights of women to access to and control of land, as well as their role as political actors in developing policies in this regard. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides a legally binding framework for recognizing and protecting women’s human rights, including a mechanism for holding government parties accountable for the actions of non-state actors.

The forum expresses its solidarity with the Jansatyagraha 2012 march, which began on October 3, 2012. Tens of thousands of people are marching from Gwalior to Delhi in India to support access to land and livelihood resources for landless, homeless and marginalized communities.

Historically, Cambodia has experienced a great deal of turmoil in land governance, while current land administration systems need to be strengthened. This is why, among all Asian countries, the land forum was hosted by STAR Kampuchea, a Cambodian member of both the International Land Coalition (ILC) and the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC). Participants expressed their solidarity with all communities that are facing eviction and the hundreds, if not thousands, of land rights activists currently imprisoned in Cambodia, in other Asian countries and the rest of the world.

About ILC Asia

The International Land Coalition (ILC) is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organizations, working together to promote secure and equitable access to and control over land for poor women and men through advocacy, dialogue, and capacity building. The members of the ILC Asia Regional Platform have been working coherently to address some of the common issues in the region through a coordinated and systematic approach. In the past few years, the members and partners have led initiatives in nine countries (India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cambodia,
Philippines, Indonesia, Mongolia, Laos) to improve access of poor men and women to natural resources and land in particular.  www.ilcasia.wordpress.com

About STAR Kampuchea
STAR Kampuchea is a Cambodian non-profit and non-partisan organization. It was established in August 1997 and is dedicated to building democracy by strengthening civil society. The official name of the organization in Khmer is SDAR Kampuchea, which means “Rebuilding Cambodia”. In English the name is written as STAR Kampuchea, which refers to the Cambodian Constitution as a “Guiding Star” for the country and its work.  www.starkampuchea.org.kh

About ANGOC
Founded in 1979, ANGOC is a regional association of 20 national and regional networks of non-government organizations (NGO) in Asia actively engaged in food security, agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture, participatory governance and rural development. ANGOC member networks and partners work in 14 Asian countries with an effective reach of some 3,000 NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs).  www.angoc.org