

Our **2P** approach

Land is more than a production resource. In the rural areas of countries like Nepal it determines an individual's socio-economic status, and is therefore strongly related to power issues. Landlessness and insecure land ownership are the major causes of poverty, social injustice and food insecurity. Tackling these issues therefore means influencing policies in favour of more land rights.

Text and photos: Jagat Deuja and Bed Prasad Khatiwada

Agriculture is the main occupation of two-thirds of the population of Nepal (and 90% of the country's poor). Yet, according to the census of 2001, at least 25 percent of the 4.2 million households do not own land – not even a place to install a hut. Historically, land in Nepal belonged to the state and its rulers, who granted it to supporters, servants or those who pleased and prayed to them. These lands, however, were not empty: there were farmers and tillers living and working there. The new landlords would then give farmers the right to farm, in exchange for the “koot” or rent paid in cash or kind. In many cases, farmers ended as bonded labourers (such as the “haliya” or the “kamaiya” in western Nepal), while in others they became sharecroppers, sharing at least half of their yields with those who officially owned the land.

Rooted at the community This overall picture continued, and although a Land Reform Act was passed in 1964, it was not until the 1990s that land became an “issue” in the country's political discussions and that various efforts were initiated. In 1995, the Community Self Reliance Centre (or CSRC) started an awareness programme in the district of Sindhupalchowk, working with landless tillers or farmers. Since 2003 the programme has expanded

significantly with the support of ActionAid and other organisations, and now reaches 50 out of the country's 75 districts. Focusing on the strong link between access to land and the universally-accepted right to food, CSRC sees the right to land as the starting point for all its efforts. By empowering land-poor men and women, CSRC helps them to claim and exercise these basic rights. CSRC's programmes have included capacity building of rights holders (poor women and men); changing and/or enacting policies in favour of the land-poor; developing new and alternative models of land reform; and creating and mobilising agents of change at the community level. Most of these activities are now co-ordinated by community members in the National Land Rights Forum. This is an organisation run by the farmers themselves, with democratically-elected committees established throughout the country. With committees in 42 districts and in more than 2,000 villages, the forum had almost 100,000 members at the end of 2010. The National Land Rights Forum sees itself as the national organisation for all those working on the land, including the landless, squatters, tenants, farmers, bonded labourers, and all those deprived of land rights. They are the ones who are leading the land rights movement in Nepal.

Pressure and partnerships CSRC's support is based on a so-called “2P approach”: helping those in the field exert *pressure* and demand their rights,



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and at the same time working in *partnership* with different organisations and the national government (participating, for example, in the government-formed High Level Commission for Land Reform). CSRC supports the establishment of village-level committees and organisations, and helps them plan their annual programmes and activities on the basis of their specific context, problems and issues. These groups then organise mass demonstrations, exerting pressure at different levels. One of these demonstrations was the “March of 100,000 Landless People” in 2008, where more than 1,200 rural women participated in 14 days of protests in the capital city, together with the different local and regional programmes of protests. In March 2011, more than 1,000 farmers spent more than one week in Kathmandu, hoping to capture the attention of the government and the political parties writing the new constitution, to ensure that it would enshrine women’s right to land. In all cases, participants have been very motivated by the struggle for their rights. Perhaps the most interesting thing to see is that they not only raise the issues they want to address, but also suggest solutions to solve their problems, putting the rights of farmers and tillers at the centre of every discussion – and even managing the logistics of their efforts. Simultaneous efforts focused on the development of

partnerships have led to the “Strategic Plan for the Land Rights Movement 2009-2013”, in which different development organisations stated their commitment to providing long-term support to Nepal’s land rights movement. Drawing on CSRC’s “Organisational, Strategic and Operational Plan”, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on January 2009 between CSRC and five partners: ActionAid, CARE, CCO/CIDA, Danida/HUGOU, and Oxfam. The Lutheran World Federation also joined this strategic partnership from 2011. All these organisations agreed to pool the necessary resources (with a “basket funding approach”) in order to promote security of tenure for land-poor women and men through pro-poor land reform. This “Strategic Partnership” has been moving ahead with significant success in terms of recognition by the state, trust by right holders, commitment by development partners and ownership of right holders. The International Land Coalition (ILC) has also supported short-term initiatives.

Recipe for success Nepal’s land rights movement has been relatively successful during the past few years. Thanks to intensive lobbying and advocacy, land has been included as a major agenda point in the Interim Constitution of Nepal (which now has a provision to “pursue a policy of adopting scientific land reform programmes by gradually ending feudalistic land ownership”, while at the same time providing that “the State shall pursue a policy of providing a minimum required piece of land for settlement to the liberated bonded labourers...”). As part of its long-term objectives, the country’s Three-year Interim Plan 2007-2010 aimed “to contribute to the national economy on the basis on just land ownership and a scientific land management system through implementation of scientific land reform.” The plan also outlined a strategy to materialise these objectives while asserting that the government would formulate appropriate laws and build institutional mechanisms to provide land to the families of landless people, tenants and squatters. One of these strategies was to constitute a High Level Commission, which is already operative. More specifically, the movement has also facilitated the direct transfer of land ownership. By the end of 2010, a total of 13,484 tenant families had obtained land titles to 3,034 hectares of land. There is still a lot to do. This experience in Nepal, however, makes us confident that working together will lead to even greater results.

Jagat Deuja (deujaj@csrcnepal.org) works as Programme Manager at the Community Self Reliance Centre, Dhapasi, Kathmandu. Bed Prasad Khatiwada (bedprasad.khatiwada@actionaid.org) is Theme Leader, Right to Food and Land, for ActionAid International in Nepal.