

PROJECT: AN EQUAL STAKE IN THE SOIL BUILDING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS FROM THE GROUND UP

SUPPORTED BY:

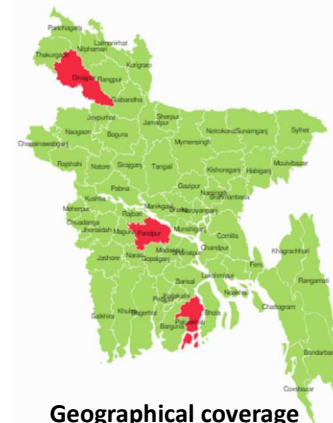
- US Dept. of State, Secretary for Global Women's Issues
- Landesa, USA
- International land coalition (ILC)

IMPLEMENTED BY:

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD)

PROJECT DURATION

October 2021 to September 2025



Geographical coverage

Nationwide, plus community-focused work in the southern coastal region (Patuakhali district, in the northern region (Dinajpur district) and mid-region (Faridpur district)

SCOPE OF WORK

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In Bangladesh, fewer than 13 percent of women in rural landowning households have documented rights to land and further, only 4-5 percent have effective control over land, particularly agricultural land. Although laws protect women's rights to own, occupy, use, manage, inherit, and transfer land, housing, and property, these laws are not effectively implemented and enforced. While the Constitution calls for equality regarding property rights, inheritance laws are based on religion and remain inequitable. This denies most women the ability to gain land rights, because most land in Bangladesh is acquired through inheritance. Even in cases where women do inherit land, they rarely receive the share accorded them under law—and even this share is inequitable relative to men. Behind this lack of implementation are institutional indifference and a lack of sensitivity to Women's Land Rights (WLR) within government, and a lack of social support and knowledge for women to realize their land rights within communities. Further, widespread patriarchal norms impede both government and community action on WLR. This combination creates a set of mutually reinforcing barriers to WLR: discriminatory norms stifle and dissuade attempts at implementation, and a lack of implementation reinforces the status quo, which views WLR as non-essential.

This project will bridge this gap. The *Equal Stake in the Soil* project complements and amplifies existing local efforts and priorities of major land-sector donors/partners and each country's government

GOAL AND OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT

GOAL OF THE PROJECT

To strengthen and sustain the capacity of networked, women-driven CSOs in Bangladesh and Colombia to create the enabling environment needed to recognize and promote women's land rights for women's economic empowerment (WEE).

OBJECTIVE-1:

Generate demand and build political will for stronger Women's Land Rights (WLR) tenure and governance.

OBJECTIVE-2:

Increase social recognition by the public at large of the legitimacy and importance of WLR, measurably reducing social and cultural barriers to WLR.

OBJECTIVE-3:

Deepen local CSOs' experience and learning in innovative approaches to directly address social norms and legal literacy around WLR to spur local implementation of and accountability for WLR.





BASELINE SURVEY FINDINGS

COVERAGE AND RESPONDENT:

A baseline survey was conducted from February 12-26, 2023, in three districts (Faridpur, Patuakhali, and Dinajpur) in the unions where project activities are planned. The panel survey included questionnaires for women (311 respondents), the women's husbands if they were married (213 respondents), service providers such as elected members of the Union Council (lowest tier of the local Govt.), land/agricultural office staff (48 respondents), and women leaders in the communities (28 respondents).

KNOWLEDGE

- We asked whether any poor woman could apply for khas (public) land. Most women and husbands said "yes" (80 percent of women and husbands). But both men and women do not know that *Khas* land policy does have the criterion of "widows and abandoned women must have an adult able-bodied son to apply for khas land".
- We also asked women and husbands if they know how to apply for khas (public) land. Very few women know that a landless certificate is required to apply for khas (public) land (only 2 percent) or that landless certificates are obtained from the Union Council (only 7 percent). Only 11 percent of husbands report knowing this information.

AGENCY

- The survey also assessed women's perceived self-efficacy in applying for khas (public) land and obtaining land documents in their name. women think it is somewhat or very difficult to apply for khas (public) land (64 percent) or obtain land documents in their name (63 percent).
- Only 3 percent of women think it would be somewhat easy to apply for khas (public) land, and none think it would be very easy.
- However, about one fifth of respondents think obtaining land documents in their name is very easy or somewhat easy, suggesting that more women perceive they can control whether they obtain land documents in their name than whether they apply for khas(public) land.

ATTITUDES

- We asked about women's and husbands' views on equality. A larger (though still a minority) group of husbands thought that women's names should not be added to land documents.
- Husbands cite mistrust between spouses, that husbands will not be willing, and potential separation with their wives as the primary reasons why spouses should not jointly register land and why women's names should not be included on land documents.
- Although a minority of husbands have these attitudes, these reasons suggest that there could be serious negative repercussions for their wives if they obtain land documents in their name.

PHYSICAL MOBILITY

- Survey findings reveal that women's mobility is extremely limited, with husbands deciding whether women can visit public places, such as urban centers or markets, or relatives.
- In general, the respondent's husband or other household member would not object if the respondent has company. Many respondents also indicate that there would not be objections to them visiting certain locations if they follow purdah/dress acceptably.

BEHAVIORS AND INTENTION TO PERFORM BEHAVIORS:

- A large proportion of women report that there is no chance that they will ever apply for khas(public) land (42 percent). On average, there is a 31 percent likelihood that women will apply for khas(public) land. For comparison, about one third of husband report that there is no scope that they will ever apply for khas (public) land.
- Focusing on the behaviors of applying for khas(public) land and adding women's names to land documents, the survey results indicate that a lack of knowledge may be the key driving factor rather than direct social norms.
- Most women do not know how to apply for khas(public) land or obtain land documents in their name and they report that they do not have the skills to do either.
- This suggests that interventions providing women with greater legal literacy to strengthen their capacity are likely to help change women's behaviors.

ENDLINE SURVEY

An endline survey will be conducted in 2025 which will help the project better understanding what interventions were most successful for use in replication to additional areas in Bangladesh and further emphasis for landless people to get land ownership.

Khas (public) land is state-owned agricultural and non-agricultural land. The government has a policy to distribute **khas (public)** land among the landless people including women. This is an opportunity to ensure access and tenurial security of the landless women and men in the country.

ONGOING INTERVENTIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF WORK

Objective-1

Generate demand and build political will for stronger Women's Land Rights (WLR) tenure and governance

Highlights of project to date

- Held national event where for the first-time transgendered persons land rights were highlighted and discussed.
- Added coalition member
- Raised awareness of importance of WLR in the context of CEDAW to Bangladesh activists, academics and policymakers
- Grassroots women represented in global online events (Raihana at online CSW event in March 2023 and APCW; and Sabina at June 2023 webinar)
- Bringing grassroots women to capital city of Dhaka for first time to talk in policy dialogue.
- Planning cross-border visit to India for local women to exchange learning.
- Planning work to sensitize coalition members on trans rights.
- Working to build advocacy capacity of transgender activists.

Current Activities

- National Level Advocacy to implement laws on land, khas (public) land distribution and settlement policy, inheritance laws, CEDAW recommendation to land, anti-discrimination act, women's right as farmers and equal wage
- Engagement with UN reporting mechanism like CEDAW, UPR, ICESCR on land and participation in the review process.

Future need

Justification:

In 2 years', project has successfully connected communities through local CSOs and started to raise demands with the policy makers on the issue of WLR and WEE. This need to be continued beyond the project period (2021-2025) with further interventions to see expected changes at the policy level.

Proposed/strategy/ Activities

- Continuation of ongoing advocacy activities at national level for policy adoption/amendment/implementation of land laws khas (public) land distribution and settlement policy, inheritance laws, CEDAW recommendation to land, anti-discrimination act, Transgender's Rights and Protection Act, Agriculture manual and policy (2018).
- Inclusion of climate change intervention focusing on its impact on women's land rights.
- Advocacy for functioning of Women Peace and Security (WPS) National action plan which to be considered as an important tool for addressing violence against women in relation to land rights.
- conduct study to see the correlation between violence against women and land, then advocate with the relevant stakeholders.



"We are fighting for our rights, rights of the transgenders for long. Recently government has initiated a policy for the transgenders' protection but nothing mentioned about our land rights. We saw S4HL has organized a national seminar focusing land rights of the transgenders for the first time in Bangladesh. This will encourage us to raise voices in strengthening our struggle for rights." Said by Joya Sikder, a transwoman, in the national seminar organized by S4HL on July 25, 2023.

Objective-2

Increase social recognition by the public at large of the legitimacy and importance of WLR, measurably reducing social and cultural barriers to WLR.

Highlights of project to date

- Wider people sensitized WLR issues through newspaper supplementary page, tv talk show, website and social media
- Community people and service providers (land office, agriculture office, Union Council) are sensitized through WLR message (by poster, leaflet, sticker and pot song).

Current Activities

- Fact finding and investigative report on WLR and published/broadcast in the media
- Sharing of WLR issues/message to the wider people through talk show, special supplementary of the national dailies.
- Production of WLR messaging for social media, television, radio, SMS, print media as relevant

Future need

Justification: To strengthen and sustain the changed practices, media campaign through various forms and means to be continued for some more years.

Proposed strategy/ Activities

- Continuation of the current interventions to maximize its result for sustainability.
- Sharing of best practices to encourage others for replication.
- Writing articles, blog through activist, media personnel and publish for wider readers.

Objective-3

Deepen local CSOs' experience and learning in innovative approaches to directly address social norms and legal literacy around WLR to spur local implementation of and accountability for WLR.

Highlights of project to date

- Gains in knowledge, confidence, mobility, and place to community shared by the trained paralegals.
- Community women organized in groups and claimed collectively their land rights, rights as farmers.
- Change in attitudes and behaviors expressed by local government officials

Current Activities

- Paralegal Training (ToT) on land literacy for community leaders.
- Awareness raising activities on land literacy and SNBC for community women and other stakeholders
- Capacitate local level CSOs on WLR and SNBC.
- Local level advocacy with land office, administration, union council, agriculture office and other relevant stakeholders.
- Court yard meetings at the community involving service providers and rights holders to hold the providers accountable and transparent. Also, to aware women/community on relevant WEE/land and climate change impact.



Faridul Islam

Changed attitude of a service provider

At the beginning of the project a community dialogue was organized at Faridpur (March 20, 2022) where Mr. Faridul Islam, Agriculture Officer of North Chanel Union attended. Then his comment was as such

March 2022: "Women are born to suffer. They cannot do agricultural work in the field because they are not skilled and also, they do not have agriculture land in their name. It is not worthy to support women with "agricultural cards".

His latest saying about women is:

September 2023: "Women are quick learner and serious about their work. I understand that if we can provide agriculture input and support, they can successfully engage in economic activities and live with peace and dignity."

After series of interactions with him, he has now become one of the most supportive persons for women seeking agriculture right.

With his active support so far 17 women have received smart agriculture card, 2 women received support for nutrition gardens, 19 women received jute seed, and 7 women received fertilizer. His views towards women have totally changed through the intervention of the project.

Future need

Justification:

Current activities allow women to become aware and learn how to seek service and demand it. In future they need more support to be organized, claim and access to their rights. Besides, activities in the current phase found very instrumental for imitating changes in the SNBC on WLR. It needs long term interventions to sustain changes in culture and attitude of the society.

Proposed strategy/activities

- Continuation of the engagement of women with the local level agriculture office to be maintained to formalize the process.
- Community in the existing pilots can be shaped up in a CBO means, structured form. This would help get the attention from the formal institutions/sectors both private and public to advance their works towards WEE. New community could be selected to provide same supports where existing communities/CBOs can act as influence/support group.
- Series of institution building technical supports like training, linkage/networking will be required
- To provide paralegal training on Land literacy for new groups of women leaders
- Continuation of awareness raising activities with women and other stakeholders on land literacy and SNBC.
- Continuation of Psycho-social support (capacity building, counselling, referral services) to the affected women while dealing with land rights.
- The outcomes of the 3 current pilot areas can be replicated in new geographical areas. We could create a TOT module and establish cross-learning field visits to scale up.



Khadija Begum

Social recognition inspired me to work as woman paralegal.

"My family has been dealing with a land dispute with our neighbours for a long time. We did not understand the land documents well. We had to depend on others. Land literacy training of ALRD has changed my life. Now I not only deal with my own problem but also can help villagers'. Khadija Begum (35) is from Dhandi village of Baulal upazila (sub-district) said smilingly.



Monira Begum

I am Confident to support community women on WLR

'I was shy and never thought of discussing such issues with my community women, even with my family. Being involved with the S4HL campaign I have the courage to challenge the existing social norms as well as the certain groups who deal with land issues. Earlier, I was afraid of talking in public but now, I am confident to conduct courtyard meetings, awareness raising sessions as well as negotiation with the Government officials.'