

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)

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

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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.

Governance and Foundational Structure

Country Coalition

The project is implemented by a Country Coalition formed with CSOs and individuals involved with land rights in Bangladesh. The membership of the Coalition is based on ILC's (International Land Coalition) membership and other CSOs working with NLC (National Land Coalition) members. Individual members include lawyers, journalists, academics, and researchers. An expert group (7 members) on WLR formed with academic, journalist, activist and researcher to guide the coalition.

Baseline Survey and Background Analysis:

In February 2023 a baseline survey has been conducted in 3 pilot locations. Information on status of women land rights, khas (public) land, WLR knowledge and attitude, SNBC gathered. Based on the baseline information the S4HL designs and modifies its activities to promote WLR in the pilot locations. At the beginning a background analysis study was conducted through community dialogue at three pilot locations (Faridpur, Dinajpur, Patuakhali), KII and desk research.

Advocacy and Capacity Building: Analysis of laws and policies (relevant to WLR), international commitments (CEDAW) and advocacy to minimize gaps and implementation; media advocacy,; capacity building, awareness raising and mobilization of the community are the key strategy of the S4HL campaign.



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.' - Monira Begum, a Paralegal Assistant from Faridpur Sadar.



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), a Paralegal Assitant from Dhandi village of Baufal upazila (sub-district) said smilingly.



CHANGES IN SOCIAL NORMS AND BEHAVIOUR



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

S4HL changes the life of Rita Murmu

Rita Murmu was a grassroots indigenous community woman. But a few months ago, she succeeded influencing the Sub-district Executive Officer to provide her a house along with other 9 families of her community under a government scheme named "Ashrayan". Rita Murmu said that she never thought that it would change her life to such an extent when she got to know the S4HL in June 2022, and its activities through participating in a community dialogue in her community.

Being marginalized, her community did not have the courage to claim land or tried to get services of the government like education support, khas land distribution, housing support, agriculture support etc. Rita, like many others in her community, faced numerous challenges due to poverty and landlessness. She works as a daily wage agriculture laborer and lives in dilapidated huts made of bamboo, straw, and earth. She learned about different government's support of land and agriculture through S4HL campaign in her village.

With the support of S4HL they prepared a list of indigenous families who need land and housing support and submitted it to the responsible government department during a formal advocacy event. However, they were rejected several times by the land office. At one point, when Rita heard that the government was about to finalize the list, she met the chief executive of the sub-district and reminded him about his commitment made to their community. The official directed the land office to provide support to the Indigenous community of Kornai village. Rita is very happy that she could help 9 other families of her community to get the same support.

Rita has a significant transformation in her life. She said that a year ago she didn't even know where the land office was. Other than the birth registration of her children she has never been to the union council also. She thought that all the government support is for the Bengali (non-indigenous, known as mainstream) people only. Now, she is fully aware that as a citizen she has the same rights like others. Rita Murmu said that she was grateful to S4HL to make her aware and stand by her.

Paralegal Assistant, catalysts in the community for WLR

Since the S4HL started intervention within the pilot community, we realized that lack of land literacy is one the key barriers for women access to land as well as other rights. Recognizing this the project identified potential women leaders from the community and provided ToT on land literacy aiming to create some paralegal assistants in the community.

At first, we formed groups of women in the community and organized regular meeting on women's land, inheritance, farmers' right, equal wage. From the group discussion we identified some potential women leaders who can support the community with legal information on land rights. The women who are interested to receive training were invited to a 6 days ToT on land literacy. Altogether, 15 community women received ToT on land literacy (paralegal).

After the training the paralegal assistants have been playing vibrant role to educate community women about land literacy and help them claiming this rights including labor rights and rights as farmers as well. Community men and women often consult with them about their land dispute, family dispute, inheritance rights and procedure of land registration, applying for khas land and other issues. Their role has turned themselves as mini lawyer in the community and Union Council often seek their help on legal issues to resolve local dispute.

ALRD realizes that legal literacy is the key contributors for women empowerment, to claim and access to land rights. If the land literacy continues and cover two third of the country than more women will have access to land and women's economic empowerment will be materialized.