



LAND & RIGHTS WATCH REPORT 2023

NO LAND
LIFE!



PANAP
Land & Rights Watch
2023 Report

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Introduction

The intertwined narratives from Tamil Nadu, India, to the villages of the Philippines paint a vivid picture of the struggles marginalised rural communities, particularly women, face in their relentless fight for land rights, dignity, and justice. These stories encapsulate the profound challenges stemming from deeply entrenched socio-political structures, economic disparities, and systemic oppression, which continue to perpetuate cycles of poverty and injustice.

Shakila's journey from a marginalised Dalit family to the forefront of the Pallur Dalit Women's Collective symbolises the spirit and determination of women facing systemic discrimination and economic hardship.

In the Philippines, against the backdrop of rapid urbanisation and development, rural communities like Kaybanban face relentless pressure from powerful real estate interests and elite landlords, leading to displacement, violence, and human rights abuses. The harrowing accounts of women farmers like Carmelita, Maricel, and Marjourie highlight the stark realities of landlessness and state-sponsored violence, where even the fundamental rights to livelihood and shelter are ruthlessly disregarded in the pursuit of profit and power.

Their stories reveal the pervasive impact of global capitalism and neoliberal policies on rural communities and indigenous peoples worldwide. From land grabs and displacement to environmental degradation and political repression, broader structural inequalities and power dynamics underline the struggles for land rights and social justice.

The experiences of courageous women farmers in Tamil Nadu and Kaybanban underscore the urgency of collective action and solidarity in confronting systemic injustice and building a more equitable and sustainable future for all, especially amid continuing political repression that rural people face as they assert their right to land and life.

In 2023, PANAP monitored 82 cases of human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles. Two women were murdered; 19 were arrested, detained or persecuted; and six were harassed or physically assaulted. Women farmers in Cambodia found themselves targeted for advocating peasants' land rights amidst the government's controversial sale of forests and agricultural lands to local elites and Chinese investors. Reports highlight the case of a Temb  indigenous woman from Brazil who was documenting attacks by security guards from Brasil Biofuels against her community. Tragically, she sustained a gunshot wound to her neck during the altercation, resulting in profuse bleeding from her mouth.

Amidst the challenges and setbacks, women's collective actions embody moments of courage and hope. Through grassroots organising, advocacy, and resistance, these women assert their rights, inspiring others to join the struggle for land, dignity, and justice. Despite the political repression, their stories are a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of collective action and solidarity in challenging entrenched systems of oppression and building a more just and truly progressive society.

In Numbers

FIGURE 1 Number of cases and victims of human rights violation in relation to land conflicts and struggles in 2023, by sector

Violation	Cases	Indigenous People	Farmers/ Farmworkers	Land activists	Unspecified	Total
Killings	26	9	11	9	6	35
Arrests	36	15	16	461	178	670
Threats	16	22	4	5	444	475
Displacement	4	48	704	0	10,000	10,752
Total	82	94	735	475	10,628	11,932

As shown in **Figure 1**, the criminalisation of peasant dissent through arrests, detention, and legal persecution accounts for the highest number of human rights violations in relation to land conflicts and struggles in 2023, with 36 incidents and 670 victims. Killings are the second most common atrocities, with 26 cases and 35 victims. Meanwhile, 475 victims were involved in 16 cases of threats, harassment, and physical assault. Lastly, a total of 10,752 victims were recorded in 4 incidents of displacement.

In 2023, a significant portion of the victims of violations related to land struggles were farmers, totaling 735. Meanwhile, land activists account for 475 of the total 11,932 victims, and indigenous peoples account for 94. Reports did not identify 10,628 of the victims.

See Annex 1 for the regional and per-country breakdown of each monitored violation

FIGURE 2 Number of victims of killings in relation to land conflicts and struggles, by sector



In the heartbreaking narrative revealed by Figure 2, the toll of violence in 2023 is tragically clear: farmers and farmworkers bear the heaviest burden, accounting for 11 of the reported killings. Following closely behind are indigenous peoples and land activists, each with 9 lives lost. Six victims, meanwhile, came from unspecified sectors.

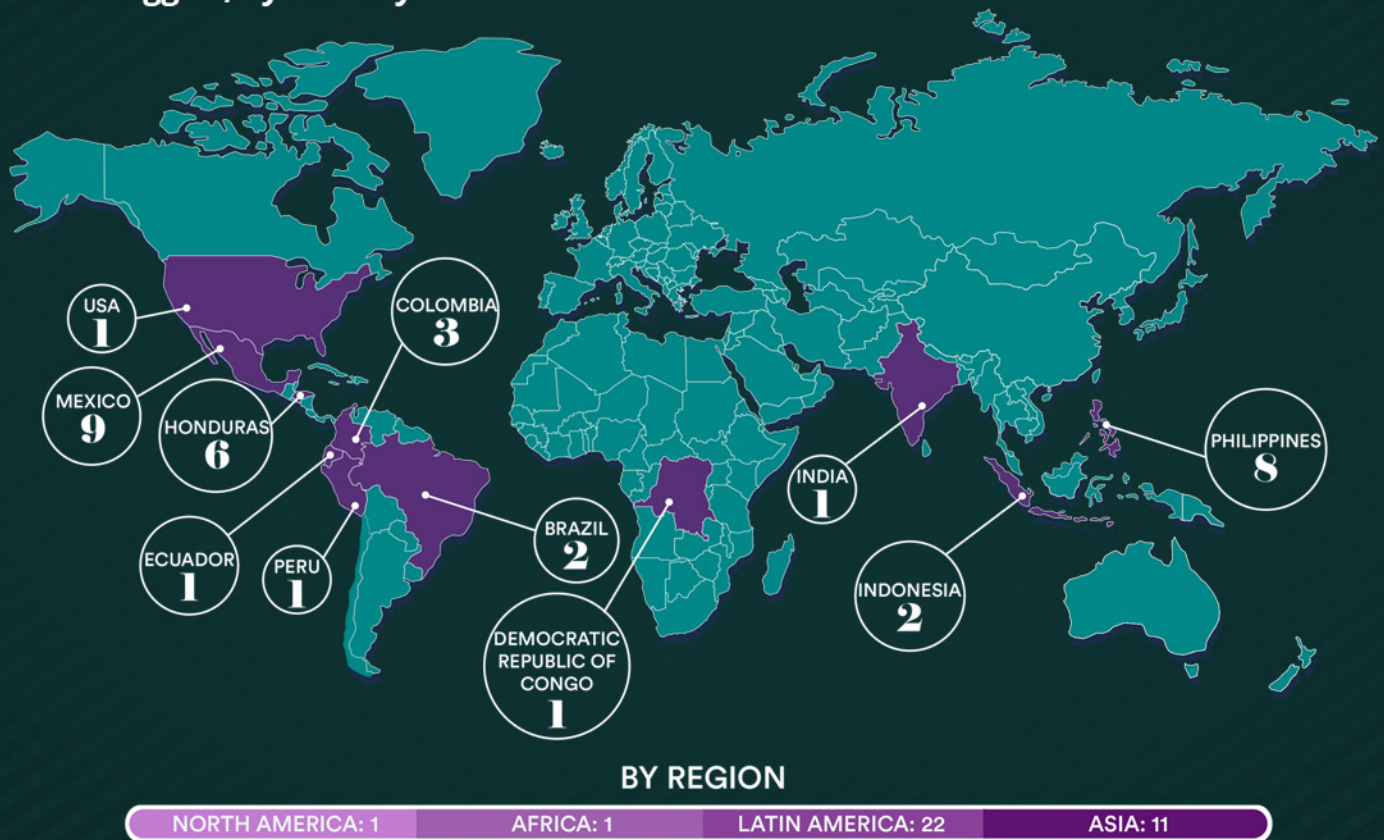
See Annex 2 for the per-sector breakdown of each monitored killing



Seruyan Regency, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia - Bangkal mourns as villagers carry Gijik's coffin, a tragic casualty of live rounds fired by police in the community.

James Watt, BBC Indonesia

FIGURE 3 Number of victims of killings in relation to land conflicts and struggles, by country



In the tumultuous landscape of 2023 for farmers, farmworkers, indigenous peoples, and land activists, Latin America stood as a somber testament to the highest number of killings worldwide as shown in **Figure 3**. Within this region, Mexico emerged as the grim frontrunner, bearing the weight of a staggering nine lives lost.

The year in Mexico was marked by a chilling echo of tragedy as Remigio de la Cruz, a respected leader of the Amuzgo indigenous community, fell victim to a fatal gunshot near his own doorstep. Yet, his untimely demise was just the prelude to a series of bloodstained chapters, all intertwined with the fierce struggle against mining interests in Michoacan¹. Among these tales of defiance, none rang louder

than the murder of Eustacio Alcala Diaz. A valiant champion in the legal battle against a transnational mining behemoth, Diaz met his end, his body discovered three agonizing days after his abduction.²

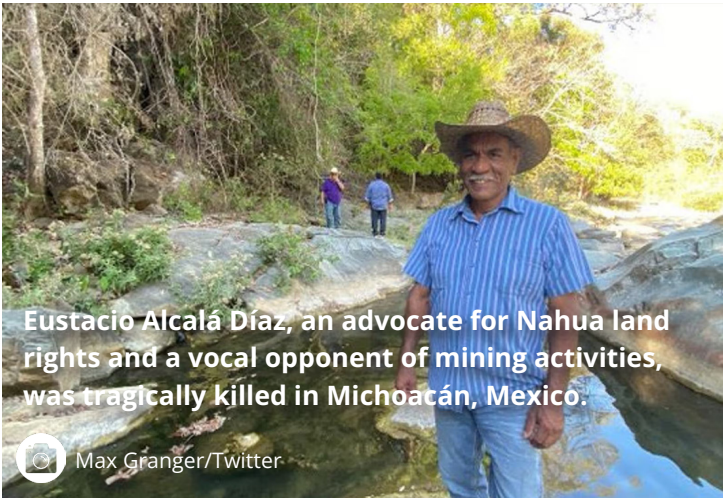
Across the seas, the Philippines bore its own burden, claiming the title for the highest number of killings in Asia. In the heart of Negros Occidental, the Fausto family, prominent members of a peasant organisation, faced a harrowing fate. Roly and Emilda Fausto, alongside their children, Ben and Ravin, were mercilessly gunned down within the sanctuary of their own home, their bodies serving as mute testimony to the brutality of armed forces.³

In Africa, Obedi Karafuru's story unfolded in terrible silence. As the president of the former

¹The member of the National Coordinator of the Amuzga Nation,... SurAcapulco. (2023, January 3). Retrieved February 10, 2024, from <https://suracapulco.mx/asesinan-al-integrante-de-la-coordinadora-nacional-de-la-nacion-amuzga-remigio-de-la-cruz/>

²Indigenous anti-mining activist found slain in Mexico. APNews. (2023, April 5). Retrieved February 12, 2024, from <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-antimining-activist-killed-6a70adebc9821a27165d12a5d898810c>

³94th IB's relentless harassment of Fausto family ends. Paghimutad Negros. (2023, June 15). Retrieved February 12, 2024, from <https://paghimutadnegros.wordpress.com/2023/06/15/94th-ibs-relentless-harassment-of-fausto-family-ends-in-massacre/>



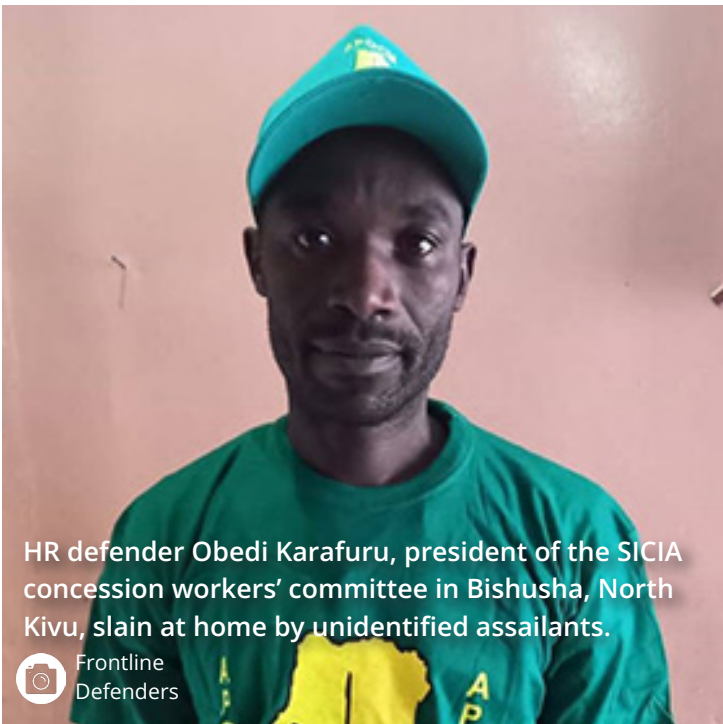
Eustacio Alcalá Díaz, an advocate for Nahua land rights and a vocal opponent of mining activities, was tragically killed in Michoacán, Mexico.

Max Granger/Twitter



In June 24, 2023, Emi Fausto's lifeless body was found outside her hut. She and her husband Roly Fausto, both active members of a local peasant organisation, together with their two children were massacred in in Negros Occidental, Philippines.

Manila Bulletin



HR defender Obedi Karafuru, president of the SICIA concession workers' committee in Bishusha, North Kivu, slain at home by unidentified assailants.

Frontline Defenders



Manuel Esteban Paez Terán lost his life while protecting a forest in Atlanta.

The Guardian/ Gabe Eisen

workers of the SICIA logging concession, he found himself entangled in a bitter land dispute engulfing over 30,000 former colleagues. Despite his valiant efforts and numerous cries for justice amidst a sea of death threats, his life was extinguished by the hands of shadowy assailants inside his house.⁴

A chilling tale of environmental activism turned fatal echoed in the Global North. In Atlanta, USA, Manuel Esteban Paez Teran, known affectionately as Tortuguita, met a grisly demise. While encamped in a forest to protest the construction of the infamous 'Cop City', Teran's voice was silenced by the deafening roar of gunfire. Months later, amidst an outcry for justice, local authorities delivered a bitter blow, absolving state troopers of culpability under the guise of 'objectively reasonable' force. Yet, even in death, Teran's truth reverberated, as autopsy reports laid bare the stark reality of 57 gunshot wounds, each a damning indictment of a system steeped in injustice.⁵

⁴Killing of human rights defender Obedi Karafuru. Frontline Defenders. (n.d.) Retrieved February 12, 2024, from <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/killing-human-rights-defender-obedi-karafuru>

⁵Donziger, S. Environmentalist Manuel Esteban Paez Teran's death is part of a disturbing trend. The Guardian. (2023, February 2). Retrieved February 13, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/02/manuel-esteban-paez-teran-climate-activist-killed-atlanta-police>

FIGURE 4 Number of victims of human rights violations in relation to land conflicts and struggles, by alleged perpetrator

	Police/Military/ Paramilitary	Private Security	Unspecified	TOTAL
Victims	11,149	516	267	11,932

State-sponsored violence remains the primary driver of recorded human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles. According to **Figure 4**, police, military, and paramilitary personnel were reportedly involved in 53 cases of killings, arrests, threats, harassment, physical assault, and displacement, accounting for 11,149 victims.


In contrast, private security personnel of companies and individuals engaged in land conflicts and disputes with rural communities were implicated in seven cases, involving 516 victims. Lastly, the remaining 22 cases, comprising 267 victims, were attributed to unidentified perpetrators.

FIGURE 5 Number of cases and victims of human rights violations in relation to land conflicts and struggles, by industry

Industry	Cases	Victims
Plantation	12	72
Mining	17	50
Energy	6	450
Tourism	2	10,012
Industrial development	9	291
Real estate development	1	1
Logging	3	2
Unspecified	32	1,054
TOTAL	82	11,932



In July, demonstrators in Jujuy province take to the streets to oppose anti-democratic constitutional changes and harsh government crackdowns.

 nacla.org/
Susie Maresca

In the intricate web of global industry, the quest for profit often collides with the fundamental rights of communities. A stark portrayal of this conflict emerges from the latest figures, where land-related human rights atrocities paint a chilling picture of injustice and struggle.

According to **Figure 5**, the mining sector looms ominously at the forefront, with the highest recorded incidents of violations. Across the map, from the sun-scorched plains of Argentina to the rugged terrain of Michoacan, Mexico, tales of arrests, killings, and disappearances reverberate, with 17 cases impacting 50 victims.^{6 7}

Yet, the shadows cast by other sectors are equally dark. The plantation industry, with its lush greenery masking a sinister reality, bears witness to 12 documented cases of violations impacting 72 victims. Among them, the blood-

stained soil of Indonesia serves as a grim reminder of the violence unleashed upon those who dare oppose the relentless march of palm oil plantations.⁸

In the realm of industrial development, the clash between supposed progress and people's protest unfolds with chilling clarity. From the communities of Camarines Sur, Philippines, to Chennai, India, the voices of dissent are met with handcuffs and hostility.^{9 10} Nine cases involving 32 victims illustrate the crackdown on opposition, with police reports stacking up like bricks against the dam of resistance.

The energy sector, fueled by the relentless pursuit of power and profits, leaves a trail of devastation and human rights abuses in its wake with six recorded cases and 450 victims. In Ecuador's Sucumbios region, the blood of

⁶Argentine police attack protesters in Jujuy. Telesur. (2023, June 19). Retrieved February 14, 2024, <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Argentine-Police-Attacked-Protesters-in-Jujuy-20230619-0013.html>

⁷Lakhani, N. and Analy Nuno. Environmental defenders reel from Mexico and Central America attacks. The Guardian. (2023, April 10). Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/10/environmental-defenders-mexico-central-america-attacks>

⁸Jong, H.N. Indonesia police slammed after protester demanding rightful land is shot dead. Mongabay. (2023, October 10). Retrieved February 10, 2024, from <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/10/indonesian-police-slammed-after-protester-demanding-rightful-land-is-shot-dead/>

⁹Umil, A.M. Four farmers in Pili arrested for cyberlibel. Bulatlat. (2023, June 22). Retrieved February 14, 2024, from <https://www.bulatlat.com/2023/06/22/pili-4-arrest-cyberlibel/>

¹⁰DM, A. Bengaluru Sankey Flyover: 70 Booked for Peaceful Protests Against Project... News18. (2023, April 3). Retrieved February 15, 2024, from <https://www.news18.com/india/bengaluru-sankey-flyover-70-booked-for-peaceful-protests-against-project-residents-term-it-draconian-7451287.html>

A glimpse captures the Esmeraldas refinery complex, operated by the Ecuadorian government, in Esmeraldas, Ecuador.

REUTERS/Daniel Tapia



Amidst the cacophony of industry-driven injustice, other sectors have their share of oppression. The logging industry, with its echoing chainsaws and felled trees, stands accused in three cases of violations, leaving over a thousand victims in its wake. The tourism sector, cloaked in the veneer of leisure and luxury, bears the burden of two documented cases, with a staggering 10,012 victims of displacement. And in the realm of real estate development, where dreams of home collide with the harsh reality of displacement, a solitary victim bears witness to the relentless march for commercial profits.

indigenous leaders stains the earth, highlighting the cost of resistance against the expansion of state-owned oil company Petroecuador.¹¹ Meanwhile, in the archipelago of Indonesia, the cries of dissent are met with the heavy hand of authority, as demonstrators against the Rempang Eco City project find themselves behind bars, with 43 individuals arrested in September.¹²

With limitations in reporting casting a veil of uncertainty, at least 39% of the total 82 cases of land-related human rights violations remain shrouded in anonymity, a haunting reminder of the countless untold stories that lie buried beneath the earth's surface.

FIGURE 6 Number of identified women victims of human rights violations in relation to land conflicts and struggles, by type of violation

Killings	2
Arrests, detention, legal persecution	20
Threats, harassment, physical assault	6
TOTAL*	28



In 2023, women farmers, farm workers, indigenous people, and land activists continued to experience attacks on their human rights. According to **Figure 6**, arrests, detention, and legal persecution were the most common types of human rights violations that women faced.

Inn Thou, a member of the 197 Land Community, along with 10 others, sentenced to one year in prison and collectively fined \$9,600.

¹¹Lakhani, N. and Anay Nuno. Environmental defenders reel from Mexico and Central America attacks. *The Guardian*. (2023, April 10). Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/10/environmental-defenders-mexico-central-america-attacks>

¹²Idrus, P.G. and Nazarudin Latif. Indonesian police arrest dozens protesting China-backed project near Singapore. *Benar News*. (2023, September 12). Retrieved February 10, 2024, from <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/police-arrest-dozens-protesting-china-project-09122023131541.html>



(Left) Dayane Temb  receiving medical treatment in the hospital following her shooting. (Right) Felipe Temb  also sustaining gunshot wounds.



One striking example is the cases of arrests of women farmers in Cambodia who were at the forefront of the struggle for peasants' land rights amid their national government's grand sale of forests and agricultural lands to local oligarchs and Chinese interests.¹³

Threats, harassment, and physical assault are the second most prevalent violations experienced by women involved in land struggles. Records show six women victims of this violation, including a Temb  indigenous woman from Brazil who was filming the attacks perpetrated by the security guards of palm oil producer Brasil Biofuels against her community. She was reportedly shot in the neck, causing her to bleed from her mouth.¹⁴

One example of a harassment case is that of the Filipina development worker Maggie Seva.

Military personnel looked for her at the office of the farmer organisation she worked with and her home, causing fear among the individuals present at the time.¹⁵

Killings hold the last spot of the violations, with two cases and two victims, both from the Philippines. One of the victims was from the aforementioned massacre, Emilda Fausto, whose lifeless body was found just outside her hut's doorway with her skull shattered and her left leg punctured with bullet wounds.¹⁶

The number of women victims across monitored reports may increase as cases, especially displacement, did not specify the victims' identities.

Annex 3 breaks down the number of women victims per country and per type of violation

¹³Villagers traveling to Phnom Penh for land-dispute protest arrested at roadblock. Radio Free Asia. (2023, June 30). Retrieved February 16, 2024, from <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/koh-kong-roadblock-06302023152042.html>

¹⁴Mendes, K. Indigenous activist demand justice after 5 shot in Amazonian 'palm oil war'. Mongabay. (2023, August 9). Retrieved February 15, 2024, from <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/08/indigenous-activists-demand-justice-after-5-shot-in-amazonian-palm-oil-war/>

¹⁵ALERT: Hands off Bicol Development Worker for peasants says human rights group. Baretang Bikolnon Online Facebook page. (2023, August 24). Retrieved February 17, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/baretangbikolnonofficial/posts/pfbid075JH8tPtdQEE8iu1zZBKUzoadTcLwciAtDyHYTdH519YnTgqD7Ap9S1L2ifzUyUl>

¹⁶94th IB's relentless harassment of Fausto family ends. Paghimutad Negros. (2023, June 15). Retrieved February 12, 2024, from <https://paghimutadnegros.wordpress.com/2023/06/15/94th-ibs-relentless-harassment-of-fausto-family-ends-in-massacre/>



PALESTINE: LAND GRABS AND GENOCIDE

Farming and cultivating the land hold profound cultural and economic significance for Palestinians, with olive trees serving as sacred symbols of resilience and connection to their homeland. Approximately 110,000 Palestinian families rely on these trees as their primary source of income, underscoring the vital role agriculture plays in their lives. Moreover, farming has long been a form of resistance against the Israeli occupation, embodying Palestinians' steadfast connection to their land.¹⁷

However, since 2023, Palestinian farmers have faced unprecedented challenges due to Israel's relentless attacks. Many have been forcibly displaced from their land, risking their lives simply to tend to their crops amidst the threat of gunfire. In the West Bank, farmers have been cut off from their orchards, depriving them of their livelihoods and further exacerbating their plight.¹⁸

In the Gaza Strip, reports indicate that Israeli military actions have targeted farmlands during times of conflict, either through direct bombing or pesticide spraying, destroying crops and rendering the soil unfit for cultivation. This deliberate destruction not only devastates Palestinian farmers' economic prospects but also undermines their ability to assert their right to self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.¹⁹

The impact of these attacks is starkly evident in Khan Younis, where farmers have been uprooted from their homes and forced to seek refuge in different parts of the city center, disrupting their lives and livelihoods. Despite these challenges, Palestinian farmers remain resilient, determined to persevere in the face of adversity and uphold their connection to their land.²⁰

¹⁷"This is no longer your land." West Bank farmers targeted. Land Coalition. (2023, November 2). Retrieved February 16, 2024, from <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/newsroom/this-is-no-longer-your-land-west-bank-farmers-targeted/>

¹⁸Vidal, M. Palestinian olive farmers hold tight to their roots amid surge in settler attacks. Mongabay. (2023, November 30). Retrieved February 17, 2024, from <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/11/palestinian-olive-farmers-hold-tight-to-their-roots-amid-surge-in-settler-attacks/>

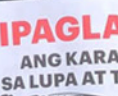
¹⁹Alsaafin, L. and Ruwaida Amer. 'Our hearts burn': Gaza's olive farmers say Israel war destroys harvest. Aljazeera. (2023, November 6). Retrieved February 14, 2024, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/6/our-hearts-burn-gazas-olive-farmers-say-israel-war-destroys-harvest>

²⁰Ibid.

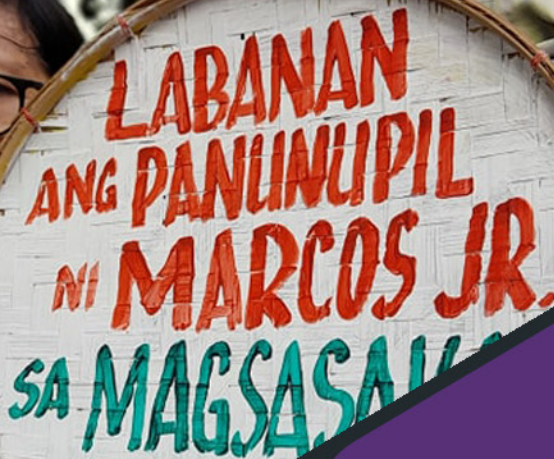


**ITIGIL ANG
PANGANGAMKAM
NG LUPA!**

KMP AMB



**IPAGLA
ANG KARANGALAN
SA LUPA AT T...**



**LABANAN
ANG PANUNUPIL
NI MARCOS JR.
SA MAGSASAKA...**

**Rural women
lead fight vs
land grab in
Philippine
village**



Women farmers in Kaybanban are at the forefront of their struggle for land rights. On the farthest right is the late Carmelita Saguid, the eldest farmer in the community.

Women have been central to agriculture since the establishment of agricultural societies, extending their influence into modern-day food systems. On average, they constitute 43% of small-scale farming in developing countries, which produces 80% of the world's food.¹ Despite their significant presence, women own less than 20% of the world's land.²

Nevertheless, women who cultivate their land are under threat, facing eviction due to purported development projects. The women farmers of a small village in the northern region of the Philippines illustrate how political and socioeconomic factors, both nationally and globally, contribute to farmer landlessness and poverty and how they are resisting this trend.

Carmelita, Maricel, and Marjourie - from a local farming village in the Philippines - exemplify how women farmers and leaders actively fight for their rights. These rural women, drawing on their historical understanding and current circumstances, unite across generations to

defend their right to land and the nation's right to food. Their efforts highlight the crucial role women play in protecting land rights within communities.

Land dispute amid construction frenzy

On October 6, 2023, private security personnel, along with individuals suspected to be local law enforcement and military personnel, fenced off the homes of 11 farmer families (approximately 50 individuals) in a disputed 38-hectare parcel of land in Kaybanban village in San Jose Del Monte (SJDM) City in Bulacan province. The security personnel acted at the behest of a real estate development company, Borough Realty Development Co. During this incident, two farmers, Benjie Jordan and Tyron Saguid, were threatened with firearms by one of the individuals in plain clothes when they attempted to record the construction process. Since then, the affected community has been living in a state of anxiety and fear.

¹Empowering women farmers to end hunger and poverty. Oxfam. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/empowering-women-farmers-end-hunger-and-poverty>

²Monique Villa. Women own less than 20% of the world's land. It's time to give them equal property rights. World Economic Forum. (2017, January 11). Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/women-own-less-than-20-of-the-worlds-land-its-time-to-give-them-equal-property-rights/>

SJDM, dubbed the ‘Balcony of the Metropolis,’ lies one to two hours north of Manila, the Philippine capital. Situated in the Central Luzon region, known as the ‘Rice Granary of the Philippines’ for its vast plains of planted rice, the city is nestled at the base of the Sierra Madre Mountain range, contributing to its hilly terrain. Agricultural lands and urbanized areas, from resettlement areas for displaced informal settlers from the capital to gated communities catering to the middle class, comprise the SJDM’s land use.

The city has become an attractive investment destination for real estate developers due to its proximity to the capital and accessibility via major roads connecting various parts of the province. Notable Filipino oligarchs such as the Villar, Marcos-Araneta, Sy, and Lopez families have heavily invested in real estate development and commercial centres. The construction of the Manila Rapid Transit-7 (MRT-7), a major railway project aimed at alleviating congestion, is expected to stimulate economic growth in the area further.

However, a closer examination of the situation facing farmers in Kaybanban and other parts of SJDM reveals that the construction boom has led to the displacement of the agricultural

sector, undermining the land rights of food producers—a critical component of the country’s food security. This phenomenon has significantly contributed to placing the Philippines, rich in land resources, second on the list of Asian nations with the worst hunger.

Community eviction

Sprawling Chinese cabbage and mustard adorn Kaybanban’s hills, painting the landscape green. Backyards of houses, overshadowed by mango trees, host rice, corn, and sweet potatoes. Mornings find farmers diligently tending to their fields, the only disruption being the six-foot tall fence encircling their homes.

Carmelita Saguid, the area’s eldest resident, reminisces about the farming community’s genesis in 1967 when her husband’s stepfather cultivated the land for the Araneta clan, the landlords of the time. She vividly recalls the abundance of mango trees that once graced the farm, dwindling over time due to natural causes.

“We raised our children here. We built our lives in this place,” shared the elderly widow. Just a month after the interview, Saguid passed away from heart failure. Her daughter, Maricel Jordan-Saguid, attributes her mother’s demise



A farmer couple tends to their crops in the hilly Kaybanban village.

to the stress induced by the fencing and the constant presence of private personnel.

In 1995, the farmers discovered that ownership had shifted to Evelyn Castro, who intended to sell the land to the Araneta-Marcoses. Unbeknownst to them, their farmlands had been exempted from the country's land reform coverage, purportedly because Kaybanban was deemed unproductive. Subsequently, Castro spearheaded eviction attempts, prompting the farmers to organise and resist.

In 2012, Castro levied false charges of trespassing, theft, and forcible entry against the farmers to discredit their decades-long tenure. However, a local court dismissed these charges within a year due to a lack of evidence.

Through their organisation, Magsasaka ng Kaybanban (Farmers of Kaybanban or Magsaka), the farmers petitioned to revoke the exemption. Like many land cases, their petition languished for years until Rafael Mariano, a progressive peasant leader, assumed leadership of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) during the early years of Rodrigo Duterte's presidency in 2016. But the elite-dominated parliament rejected Mariano's confirmation as DAR chief a year later.

Facing mounting pressure, Castro offered monetary compensation, leading around 30 families to accept the settlement. Elderly heads of households received PHP 300,000 (around USD 5,000), while the next generation received PHP 100,000 (around USD 1,800). Despite setbacks and legal defeats, the remaining farmers persisted. "We will not accept Borough Company's offer of money. Money may run out, but with land to till and plant on, we will definitely live." Marjourie Barrameda, one of the active women leaders of Magsaka, pointed out. They filed a motion for reconsideration in 2022 and exposed the company's schemes on social media platforms.

In response, Borough filed a cyber libel case against them, mirroring their earlier failed attempts at legal intimidation.

As tensions escalated, Borough's tactics grew increasingly nefarious. Colluding with local village officials, the company illegally fenced the farmers' houses, instilling fear within the community.



Face-off

The affected families contacted local authorities to protest Borough's illegal fencing, but their efforts proved futile. In October, officials, led by village chief Ereberto Belisano, effectively disregarded their request for a dialogue. Despite waiting several hours on

Man on stripes threatened Benjie Jordan and Tyron Saguid with his gun when they attempted to take a video of the construction of the fence.



the scheduled date, the authorities failed to appear. “Our officials were disdainful and rude to us. We arrived at the village hall at 10 am as agreed, but they were nowhere to be found. We expected them to arrive by noon. We skipped lunch and waited until 2 pm, but no one came to address us,” recounted Barrameda.

Furthermore, the local police declined to accept the incident report submitted by the organisation, along with comprehensive photo documentation.

Finally, on October 18, pressure compelled the village official to confront the farmers. Holding their local authorities accountable, the farmers questioned why they allowed the fencing to proceed. Alongside Alyansa ng Magbubukid ng Bulakan (Bulacan Farmers’ Alliance), Magsaka’s mother chapter, they asserted that the fencing constituted harassment because the permit granted only covered supposedly the boundaries of the disputed 39-hectare area, not the farmers’ residences. The farmers were steadfast in their determination to defend their land, citing the fencing as a blatant violation of their land rights and legal processes, especially as a motion for reconsideration was still pending with the DAR. Additionally, the deployment of personnel during a period of local elections gun ban further compounded the violation of laws. “It was a clear breach of regulations,” asserted one farmer. Finally, they highlighted how the fence hindered their agricultural activities, notably blocking Tyron Saguid’s access to the water source.

In response, the village leader claimed ignorance of the deployment and fencing, deferring explanation to one of the village councilors. It became evident that he was uninformed about the plight of his constituents, unaware even that the group had already filed a report complete with photo documentation. The group demanded the names and pertinent



The fence blocks the rice fields and planting areas from the farmers’ houses.





On October 6, Magsaka went to the village council office for the scheduled dialogue with the local leader and the company to no avail.

 Magsaka

details of the deployed personnel, compelling the village council to provide the information. Finally, the group warned that any escalation of violence within the community would be the responsibility of the local leaders.

When asked how the dialogue went, Barrameda stated, "I am not convinced by what the officials were saying. They could not even provide a simple document. They were pointing fingers at random people, but it is the village chief who should have firsthand knowledge of the situation concerning his constituents. He refused to be held accountable. He would say he doesn't know about the issue or that he was not in town when it happened. Who would believe that? We have rotten governance here in Kaybanban."

Pro-foreign, pro-elite

For years, the Philippine government has directed its efforts towards creating and developing the Greater Capital Region (GCR), an expanded version of Manila incorporating nearby urban provinces such as Cavite (the country's most populous province), Laguna,

Rizal, and Bulacan, collectively referred to as Mega Manila, positioning it as a global gateway to the international market through infrastructure projects, mostly foreign funded, in transportation, highways, business centres, etc.³ SJDM is strategically placed within this development plan due to its location.

For decades, the country's development programs have been shaped by foreign markets and interests, in collaboration with big local oligarchs and politicians and often at the expense of communities. The GCR development program and the pressure it creates on communities like Kaybanban in SJDM illustrates this.

Programs that are supposed to benefit the poor are systematically designed to favor big business. For instance, instead of equitable redistribution of vast private agricultural landholdings to farmers, the Philippines' Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) has failed to dismantle land monopolies and curb the continuous corporate takeover of productive lands. CARP's retention of large landholdings through exemptions, particularly those with

³Palatino, Mong. *Political Struggle in the 'Greater Capital Region' of the Philippines*. Manila Today. (2017, March 15). Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://manilatoday.net/political-struggle-greater-capital-region-philippines/>

slopes of 18% or more, has perpetuated land concentration. The Kaybanban case and similar instances in SJDM demonstrate how CARP has systematically granted unjustified exemptions from land reform coverage. Even when covered, the program allows various schemes to evade actual redistribution. Moreover, subsequent government issuances have facilitated land-use conversion by reducing documentary requirements and shortening the process.

Such land policies have facilitated the emergence of a new landed elite, acquiring vast land tracts for speculation, real estate, construction, mining, energy, and tourism. These large landholders include prominent oligarchs like the Araneta-Marcoses, the Villars of Vista Land, and Ramon Ang of SMC, all with investments in SJDM City.

Moreover, the current Marcos administration vigorously pursues the National Land Use Act, which permits the conversion of agricultural lands for commercial use. This proposed law aims to provide a national framework for land resource development under the pretext of “sustainable development,” effectively reclassifying agricultural lands for industrial and tourism purposes. The bill’s primary sponsor openly acknowledges its purpose: to present the Philippines as an enticing investment destination for foreign investors.

This convergence of factors, driven by the collusion of foreign and local capitalists, the landed elite, and national and local authorities, portends bigger agricultural ventures in the GCR, marginalising farmers and leaving them with dwindling landholdings. This trend particularly impacts farming communities in SJDM, including in the Kaybanban village.

Political repression

The absence of land reform and national industrialisation has plunged the Philippines into a perpetual crisis. Unfair tenant relations and land dispossession have driven peasants into arduous struggles for their land rights.

Farmers in SJDM have organised themselves into associations, forging alliances with other farmers and advocates. However, state harassment and violence meet their efforts to assert their right to land and resources.

In 1999, four farmers were killed and two others injured amidst their battle against the Aranetas for land rights in Tungkong Mangga village in SJDM. In September 2015, an elderly farmer-activist couple was shot dead in the same village while military operations were ongoing.^{4 5} Then, in March 2019, local peasant leader Larry Suganob Jr. was fatally shot outside his hut in another SJDM village.⁶

The city has witnessed numerous arrests, intimidation tactics, and military deployments in various villages orchestrated by landlords, in collusion with state security forces, against organised farmers over the past decades. These attacks reflect the dire state of peasants’ civil and political rights.

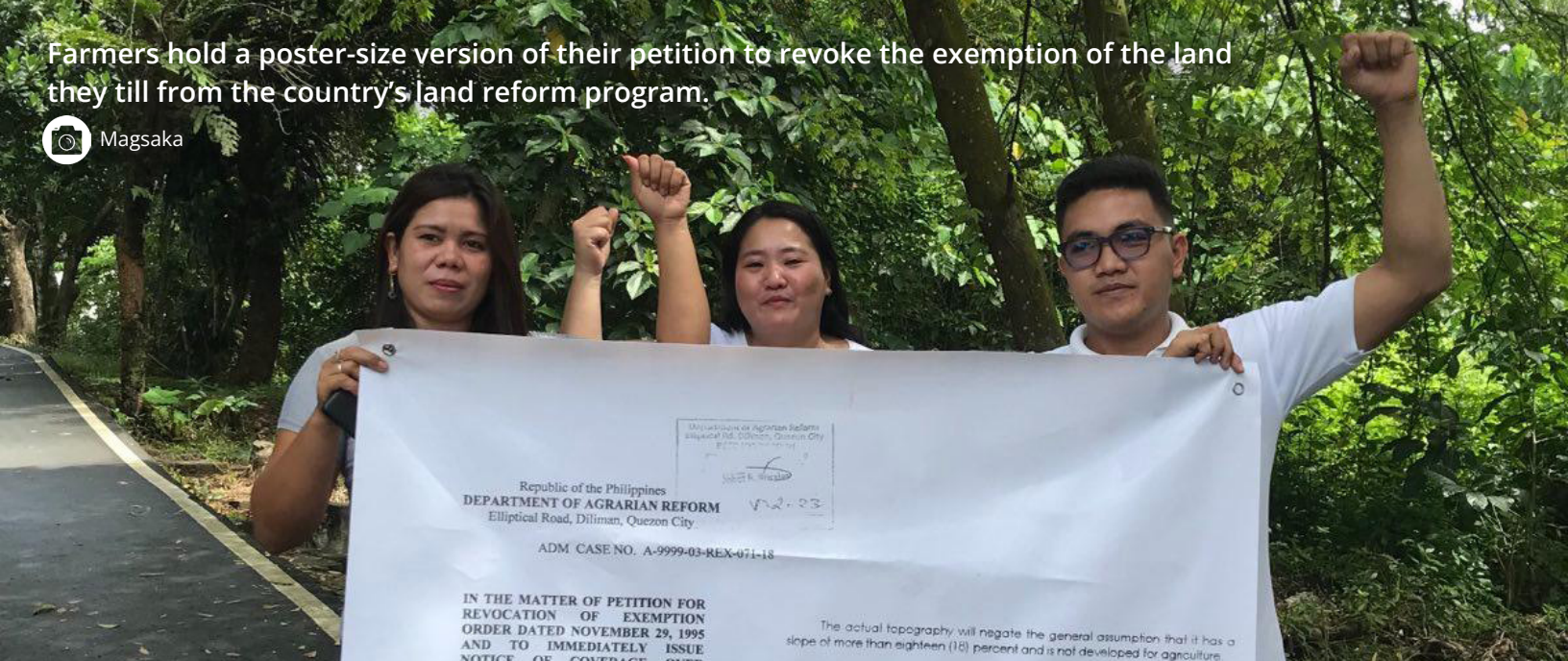
Peasants consistently account for the most significant proportion of extrajudicial killings in the country. According to PANAP’s Land & Rights Watch monitoring, out of the 227 victims of killings in the related to land rights from 2017 to 2023 in the Philippines, 139 were farmworkers and farmers, 34 were land advocates, and 48 were indigenous peoples.

⁴Ac-ac, Mike. *Irrigation Project Brings Water - and Hope - to a 'Forgotten Village'*. *Bulatlat*. (2002, August 18 to 24). Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.bulatlat.com/news/2-28/2-28-mike.html>

⁵Ellao, Janess Ann J. *Farmer-activist couple killed in Bulacan*. *Bulatlat*. (2015, Semtember 20). Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.bulatlat.com/2015/09/20/2-farmer-activists-killed-in-bulacan/>

⁶Justice for Larry Suganob Jr. *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas*. Facebook Page. (2019, 22 March). Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.facebook.com/kilusangmagbubukid/posts/10156464452718386>

Farmers hold a poster-size version of their petition to revoke the exemption of the land they till from the country's land reform program.



Massacres in or near large landholdings, called haciendas, are tragically common in Philippine history. Incidents like the Escalante massacre in 1989, where 20 were killed; the 2004 Hacienda Luisita massacre, resulting in the deaths of nine protesting farmers; and the Sagay massacre in 2018, which left nine farmers dead, are just a few examples.

Unsurprisingly, the five-decade armed struggle waged mainly by peasants in the country continues to intensify. As land grabs escalate and rural poverty intensifies, such as in SJDM, many Filipino farmers have resorted to an alternative revolutionary path, with their nationalist aspirations centred on the pursuit of genuine land reform.

Women and the struggle for land and rights

According to Cathy Estavillo, secretary-general of the Philippine-based Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women, rural women play an important role in the country's rural economy and in the struggle for genuine land reform.

"As an agricultural country, the majority of the Philippine population comprises farmers, and half of them are women. They are involved

in all stages of production - from planting to preparing the food on the table. They further strengthen and amplify the calls for genuine land reform as a solution to the nation's crisis," said Estavillo, who is also the secretary-general of the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC).

APC is an Asia-wide coalition that struggles for the rights of farmers, landless peasants, fisherfolk, agricultural workers, Dalit, indigenous peoples, herders, and pastoralists, including women and youth across these sectors.

Estavillo echoed the statements of Kaybanban's women peasant leaders: "Our organisation's clamor is our right to land. We do not want to be harassed but instead claim what is rightfully ours. We want our rights as free citizens to be recognised. We hope that the government will take care of Filipino farmers. They should not neglect us so that we would not need to import food from other countries. We can produce the nation's food needs if land is provided to us."

She also stressed the importance of consciousness raising, organising, and mobilising for their right to land, food, and work. "Through collective struggle and action, rural women are able to assert their right to retain their land."



**In India,
Dalit women
struggle for
land and
rights**

TAMIL NADU, India - Shakila Kalaiselvan, founder and leader of the Pallur Dalit Women's Collective, had a rough childhood. Born in a Dalit family, Shakila's parents were landless agricultural labourers. Her father eventually left them for another woman, leaving her mother to raise two daughters single-handedly. Shakila saw her mother struggle to support them with very meagre labour wages. "She worked daily in the fields, but when it was time for harvest, we still had nothing to eat."

At 16, Shakila married a Sri Lankan repatriate who was rejected by her community. Between her husband's earnings doing odd jobs and her wages from agricultural labour, they could barely make ends meet for their three children, two boys and one girl.

This prompted Shakila to approach Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED). Founded in 1979, SRED is a network of four state-level women's movements and 14 mostly women-led village-level movements from 350 villages in three districts in Tamil Nadu, India.

"Without women like her, we cannot do what we do," said SRED Executive Director Fatima Burnad of Shakila. Burnad is also a member of PAN Asia Pacific's (PANAP) Steering Council.

Caste system and landlessness

The prevailing caste system in India continues to oppress Dalits and indigenous women. They are regarded as the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy based on ritual purity and occupation. In Tamil Nadu and other Indian states, more than 60% of Dalit households are landless.

As land cultivators, Dalit women cannot access benefits from the state. They are not recognised as farmers or agricultural workers and are regarded as very low status in society. Discriminatory practices deny them their basic rights, even though the Hindu Succession Act and the Land Reform Act recognise their right to

share in family properties. Because of this, they are the most disadvantaged and worst affected groups in their communities and society.

The Pallur Dalit Women Collective was formed in 2016 when Shakila sought the help of SRED's Dalit Women's Movement to claim 7.5 acres (three hectares) of illegally-occupied common land (wastelands) in two places in their community. After a series of training meetings on Dalit Rights and Land Rights, Shakila organised and mobilised 40 Dalit women to assert their entitlements at the District Administration for Land Titles.

Now, with the women's collective farm, Shakila attests, "This is the first time in my life that I get to bring home whatever I harvest. Before, I couldn't do that with my labour wages; it is the best feeling to know that you are tilling your own land and growing your own food."

Women in unity and action

However, the Pallur Dalit women's victory was not without serious hurdles.

At first, the District Administrator completely ignored them; even the Village Administrative Officer refused to give them the requested land maps. They also approached the Taluk office, where they were told that it is only "natural" for landowners to encroach on common land.

Seeing no positive and helpful response from the government, the women decided to assert their rights and take matters into their own hands. They hired a JCB truck to clear the land, but when the driver found out it was common land, he backed out. Still, the women did not falter. They persisted in toiling and eventually cleaned the rocky and thorny ground themselves.

SRED supported them by providing a solar water pump to irrigate both lands. They were also offered agricultural instruments and seeds that helped them preserve their own seed bank.

The women's perseverance and collective action made the lands fertile and rain-fed. They dug up a pannai kuttai (farm water-saving pond) to collect rainwater and built tanks to store water.

All these efforts were met with obstacles from the government and local bureaucrats. The Revenue Officers first summoned them because of a petition by caste landlords alleging that the sand quarry they made would be used illegally. The women protested before the Revenue Officer and successfully refuted the allegations. They demanded their land titles, but the Revenue Officer told them that, while they could continue cultivating the lands, no titles would be given to them because the government supposedly intended the lands for cattle grazing. In the end, the women succeeded in asserting their rights. They now have claimed the lands they have fruitfully utilised for collective farming.

The Pallur Dalit women faced their biggest challenge when a landlord interested in buying their land attempted to kill Shakila. The women exposed and fought this sinister attempt by supporting each other and asking for the help of SRED and their supporters. Once again, the women's strength in their unity and collective action enabled them to fight and overcome this grave threat against one of their sisters.

Inspiration

As Dalit women who historically were not allowed to own lands, be independent in decision-making, and were consistently discriminated against due to caste and gender, Shakila and the Pallur Dalit Women Collective inspire all Dalit women. Because of their success, Shakila mobilised 40 more women to occupy another 2.5 acres (one hectare) of land in Pallur. The collective had also identified some 18 acres (7.3 hectares) more to claim and has started a seed bank preparing for organic farming.



Shakila Kalaiselvan and the Pallur Dalit Women's Collective inspire Dalit women to assert their right to land.

Through the years and presently, as a collective, the women have been cultivating and harvesting lentil, corn, green gram, red gram and millet. SRED assisted them with various training programs on natural farming methods, including preparing vermicompost, natural manure and pesticides. Shakila and other collective members have also started driving the tractor.

The collective members equally share the produce after harvest. They have built their water tanks and rainwater-collecting ponds from scratch. They put up their pipelines for irrigation. They have set up their own office where they keep their agricultural instruments and seeds for collective farming.

Shakila has also attended meetings and conferences at local, national and regional events to share their successful and inspiring story. She participated at the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partners (RCEP) meeting in Hyderabad, the All India Kissan Movement in New Delhi, the Delhi National Conference of Women organised by Makaam, and the National Dalit Conference in Pune to represent landless Dalit women, promote organic farming and condemn corporate land-grabbing. "Agricultural land should not be given to foreign investors. Farming in this country depends on small tenants and landless labourers, and the majority of labour comes from women."

Fighting oppression

SRED's Burnad firmly believes that issues of caste and gender, especially among Dalit women in rural India, are deeply rooted in societal class struggle. It is not a coincidence that most landless women come from lower castes. As Dalit women, they do not have

equal opportunities to land, employment or even the most basic of services. Poverty and discrimination against Dalit women are the main reasons that motivate them to organise and mobilise themselves into movements and collectives to fight for their land rights.

Burnad says, "The integration of the Dalit women's movement and the landless labourers' struggles will become a broad people's movement to fight against oppression in society. We must continue to educate, train and organise Dalit women to fight against their own oppressions and the oppressions of others to achieve a new and just society where everyone, irrespective of sex, class or caste, is equal. Such programs help Dalit women go out of their villages to meet other women and listen to their problems. Neither women's problems nor social problems can be solved as long as women remain isolated in their homes."

Indeed, the non-recognition of Dalit women's land rights is the major block in realising the full potential of women to improve rural livelihoods. The social structures of caste and gender and their correlations with economic structures prevent Dalit women from mobilising themselves to claim their land rights. At the policy level, India's land governance system and "land reforms" have further strengthened patriarchal norms of society at village, state and national levels.

The recognition of women as farmers and their rightful representation in government and relevant institutions would bring them into the public process of land distribution and ownership and access to resources, not only for their empowerment but also for the common good of their communities.

Annex 1 Human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles, by country/region and types of violations

Asia Pacific	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
Afghanistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Azerbaijan	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0
Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	2	18	1	48
Cambodia	0	0	4	42	0	0	1	10,000
China	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Egypt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
India	1	1	7	30	2	250	0	0
Indonesia	2	2	2	63	1	2	1	204
Iran	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kuwait	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jordan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Laos	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nepal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Myanmar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malaysia	0	0	1	4	1	1	0	0
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Palestine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Papua New Guinea	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Philippines	5	8	8	29	4	5	0	0
Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey	0	0	0	0	1	11	0	0
Vietnam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asia Pacific TOTAL	8	11	25	172	11	287	3	10,252

Latin America	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
Argentina	0	0	1	68	2	172	0	0
Brazil	1	2	1	1	1	5	0	0
Bolivia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chile	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colombia	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dominican Republic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	1	1	1	2	2	11	0	0
El Salvador	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0
Guatemala	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Honduras	4	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	6	9	2	5	0	0	0	0
Nicaragua	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Panama	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paraguay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peru	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Venezuela	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Latin America TOTAL	16	22	7	82	5	188	0	0
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Africa	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
Angola	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Benin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cameroon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Congo	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chad	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ivory Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kosovo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kenya	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Morocco	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sierra Leone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Africa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sudan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tanzania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tunisia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uganda	0	0	1	11	0	0	1	500
Zambia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Zimbabwe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Africa TOTAL	1	1	1	11	0	0	1	500
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North America	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
Canada	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0
United States	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
North America Total	1	1	1	5	0	0	0	0

Europe	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
France	0	0	1	200	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	0	0	1	200	0	0	0	0
Scotland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Romania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Europe TOTAL	0	0	2	400	0	0	0	0

Australia	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
Australia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australia TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

GRAND TOTAL	Killings		Persecution		Physical Assault		Displacement	
	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims	Cases	Victims
	26	35	36	670	16	475	4	10,752

CASES TOTAL

82

VICTIMS TOTAL

11,932

Annex 2 Number of cases and victims of killings related to land conflicts and struggles, by sector

Asia Pacific	Cases	Victims				
		People	Farmworkers	Land Activists	Unspecified	Total
India	1	0	1	0	0	1
Indonesia	2	1	0	0	1	2
Philippines	8	0	6	0	2	8
TOTAL	8	1	7	0	3	11

Latin America	Cases	Victims				
		People	Farmworkers	Land Activists	Unspecified	Total
Brazil	1	2	0	0	0	2
Colombia	3	2	1	0	0	3
Ecuador	1	1	0	0	0	1
Honduras	4	0	3	3	0	6
Mexico	6	2	0	4	3	9
Peru	1	1	0	0	0	1
Total	16	8	4	7	3	22

Africa	Cases	Victims				
		People	Farmworkers	Land Activists	Unspecified	Total
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	1	0	0	1	0	1

North America	Cases	Victims				
		People	Farmworkers	Land Activists	Unspecified	Total
United States	1	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	1	0	0	1	0	1

Annex 3 Number of identified women victims of human rights violations, by type of violation*

Country	Killings	Arrests/ Detention/ Legal Persecution	Threats/ Harassment/ Physical Assault
Argentina	0	0	1
Bangladesh	0	0	1
Brazil	0	0	2
Cambodia	0	11	0
Malaysia	0	0	1
Mexico	0	1	0
Philippines	2	8	1
Total	2	20	6

*Excluding displacement

About



PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) is one of the five regional centres of Pesticide Action Network (PAN). PANAP works for the elimination of harm caused by pesticides on human health and the environment. PANAP also promotes agroecology, helps strengthen people's movements in their assertion of rights to land and livelihood, and advances food sovereignty and gender justice.

As a network, PANAP is currently comprised of more than 100 partner organisations from the Asia-Pacific region and has links with about 400 other regional and global civil society and grassroots organisations.

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