

# Our stories, One journey

**MALAYSIA**  
JULY 15-26

**CHINA**  
APR 22-MAY 3

**PHILIPPINES**  
MAR 8-12

**VIETNAM**  
AUG 5-16

**CAMBODIA**  
MAY 13-23

**INDONESIA**  
APR 9-19

**SRI LANKA**  
JUN 24-JULY 5

**INDIA**  
JUN 3-17

**EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN IN ASIA**

ASIAN RURAL WOMEN'S COALITION  
PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
OXFAM'S EAST ASIA GROW CAMPAIGN

**Our Stories, One Journey**  
**Empowering Rural Women in Asia**

Asian Rural Women's Coalition  
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Oxfam's East Asia GROW Campaign  
October 2013

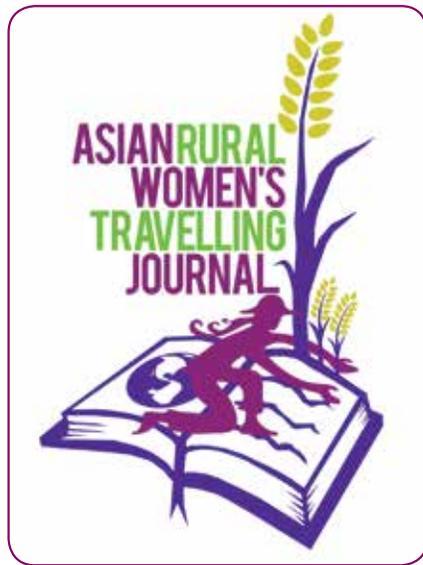
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## **Our Stories, One Journey**

Empowering Rural Women in Asia

2013

Asian Rural Women's Coalition  
Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific  
Oxfam's East Asia GROW Campaign

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# Foreword

This booklet is a collection of the wealth of insight and inspiration from rural women who participated in the travelling journal, an initiative from the Asian Rural Women's Coalition (ARWC), Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), Oxfam's East Asia GROW Campaign, and our partner organisations. We are especially proud of the initiative as it provided the opportunity for rural women to share their thoughts and their lives as small food producers, workers, family members and women.

The journal comes at a time when Asian rural women are more marginalised and food insecure as ever, facing the onslaught of corporate agriculture and neo-liberal policies which benefit a few corporations and countries, and elites. The impact of these policies has caused loss of livelihoods, destruction of the ecosystem and increased hunger and malnutrition. But women are confronting these challenges with strong determination for change and providing solutions that protect their rights and safeguard their livelihoods, environment and their communities. They continue to organise themselves and provide leadership roles in their communities and beyond.

We are happy that the journal, the first of its kind, gave women a voice to share their lives and their struggles, albeit for a short period of time. Many have written that the journal initiative has been an enriching experience and increased their awareness and solidified their solidarity with other rural women and with communities.

But the journey of the journal is far from over—we need now to share these stories of women as far as and to as many communities as possible to serve as an inspiration and even as a guide to strengthen themselves as women, as farmers and be part of a movement for change.

**Sarojeni V. Rengam, Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP)**

**Marjo Busto, Asian Rural Women's Coalition (ARWC)**

**Norly Grace P. Mercado, East Asia GROW Campaign (Oxfam)**

# *The Journey*



Rural women need the chance to be heard.

This is the basic premise from which sprung forth the idea of a journal that will travel across the region, collecting stories and insights of Asian rural women.

The Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) and the Asian Rural Women's Coalition (ARWC) held a regional leadership training for rural women in Sri Lanka on July 2012, and again in the Philippines last January 2013. During these trainings, it was realised that developing women to be community leaders must be accompanied by a veritable documentation of their life and struggles. And who can document better than the women themselves?

Simultaneously, Oxfam's GROW campaign in East Asia started efforts in forging linkages with formations of women small holders in the region. The idea of documenting the stories and struggles of rural women, and enabling them to share these with other women in the region came about. As a campaign aimed at providing food for everyone, GROW recognises the inherent role of women as food producers and providers. It was hoped that this initiative would help highlight this important role, and in the course, empower women. And

as part of an initial engagement, all three organisations developed the concept of the Travelling Journal of Rural Women in Asia.

Eight countries participated in the one-of-a-kind travelling journal: Philippines, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, India, and Indonesia. In these countries, food security and sustainable agriculture are critical issues as ever, affecting millions of rural women.

According to the UN Economic and Social Council, women make up a little over half of the world's population, but they account for over 60 percent of the world's hungry. Women play important roles in food and agricultural production, yet their work is often unrecognised and undervalued. Worse of all, threats to livelihood and rights to access and control resources are escalating everywhere. Land grabbing, monopoly and market-oriented agricultural production, introduction of genetically engineered crops, food and financial crises, as well as climate change, have all contributed to the further displacement and marginalisation of rural women.

Partner organisations that joined the leadership trainings held by PAN AP and ARWC understood well the need to



empower rural women to face these challenges. It was agreed that one way to empower them is to give them a voice, which will be heard not just locally or nationally, but internationally as well.

Thus, the ARWC, PAN AP, and Oxfam's East Asia GROW Campaign collaborated to make the travelling journal a reality. The journal was a unique chance for rural women to be empowered through storytelling, and for the rest of the world to have a unique glimpse into the lives

of ordinary yet remarkable women. The goal was to share experiences, perspectives, and initiatives, and to draw valuable lessons on women's resilience, innovativeness, and strategies in achieving food security and agricultural development. The goal was to raise awareness on the situation of rural women and their communities' unsung efforts to assert rights over land and resources.

So began the journey of the travelling journal. From each country, a woman writer must write down, or illustrate through drawings or photos, her daily activities for a period of 10 days. Through journal entries—an age-old form of personal expression—the woman writer must depict herself in her own home and community. The community must be situated within various issues and struggles relevant to the global situation regarding food and agriculture.

Each partner organisation went to their communities and consulted women on the travelling journal initiative. After the project was met with much enthusiasm, the women chose whom among themselves could best represent and articulate their issues, in what they considered as a collective endeavour.

The journal began its journey in the Philippines on March 8, 2013, timed significantly on the celebration of International Women's Day. The journal was passed on from a woman writer to the next, travelling across eight Asian countries—Philippines, Indonesia, China, Cambodia, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and finally, Vietnam—for six months. As the collection of stories grew, the voice of the rural woman continually became stronger and more resonant as each blank page is filled with stories previously unknown or unimagined by many people.

In the journal, Margie Tagapan from the Philippines told of how a women-led rice cooperative has brought relief to people facing hardships from destructive quarrying operations. Suryati of Indonesia cared for the family of peasants who are in jail because of trumped-up charges related to their struggle for land. Li Zizhen of China waxed poetic about how the Bai minority keeps their culture and traditional food alive, and how farmers try to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. The journal entries of Chey Siyat of Cambodia described how increasing agricultural productivity is an effort that starts from the home, and is sustained by the entire community.

Halfway through the journey, the journal almost became lost—such is the risk of having it pass through the hands

of so many. Yet, partner organisations and women writers who cared for it proved themselves capable of preserving the journal and its stories.

Shanthy Gangadaran of India, a Dalit who has helped women attain land rights, counselled farmers who are mired in debt and contemplating suicide. Amara Hewagallage of Sri Lanka proved that to be a community activist is to have little rest and instead fill each day with things that needed to be done, from dialogues with





government to ecological agriculture trainings and seed exchanges. Tija Anak Mang of Malaysia wrote of how she enjoins fellow farmers to resist encroachment from a palm oil plantation, and how she struggles to keep her own native lands free from pollution. Bui Thi Huong of Vietnam mixed personal emotions on the death of her mother-in-law, and descriptions of her duties as head of a women's union, such as leading efforts in System of Rice Intensification and Integrated Pest Management.

The journal was formally turned over by Vietnam's Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) to PAN AP during its 3rd Congress in Penang, Malaysia last September 2 to 4, 2013. Partner organisations from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka came together during the journal turnover ceremonies. An exhibit that shows the photographs of the eight women writers in action also went on display during the PAN AP Congress.

In each of their stories, the women writers illuminated situations and carried demands that a reader would be enriched to discern for themselves. Their message was simple: help transform agriculture into a more equitable, fair and sustainable system.

The ARWC, PAN AP, and Oxfam's East Asia GROW Campaign are taking the initiative to cull from the travelling journal a list of demands on how Asian rural women would like to proceed with their stories and on how they would like to see their communities in the future, as stories and communities that are representative of the whole region.

These demands will be brought to the Food and Agriculture Organization's Committee on Food Security 40th Session

in Rome on October 7 to 11, 2013, where the agenda includes a discussion on small holder agriculture for food security and nutrition. Finally, these demands will be at the center of coordinated actions in different countries leading towards October 15, the International Rural Women's Day.

The International Rural Women's Day is always an occasion to highlight rural women's leadership, and their critical roles and contribution in food security and agricultural development. Incidentally, it is the eve of the World Food Day. To highlight the reality of hunger and displacement being faced by small food producers in rural communities, this day, October 16, is dubbed as World Foodless Day.



Hence, the travelling journal will be culminated by partner organisations through various actions before and during these days. These actions include public fora, workshops, conferences, public meetings, food exhibits and seed exchanges, rallies, public demonstrations, and dialogues. The women writers will be recognised and honoured by their communities during the culmination.

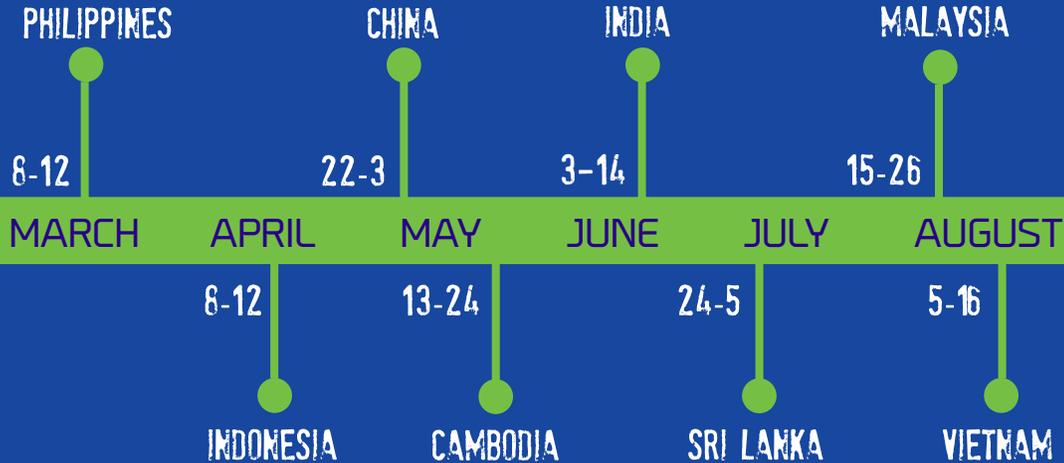
The demands of Asian rural women call for radical changes in current food and agriculture policies and framework – changes that require painstaking, collective efforts at the local, national, and international levels. Demanding change, however, is often the beginning of change itself. As we can see from the journal stories, this change has already begun on the ground, with empowered rural women leading the way forward.



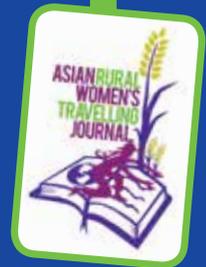
*Feature Stories*

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## THE TRAVELLING JOURNAL TIMELINE



[www.travellingjournal.asianruralwomen.net](http://www.travellingjournal.asianruralwomen.net)



A close-up portrait of Margie Tagapan, a 62-year-old woman, looking upwards and to the left. She is wearing a dark brown hat and a floral patterned shirt. The background is a blurred field of green and red flowers. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**MARGIE'S**

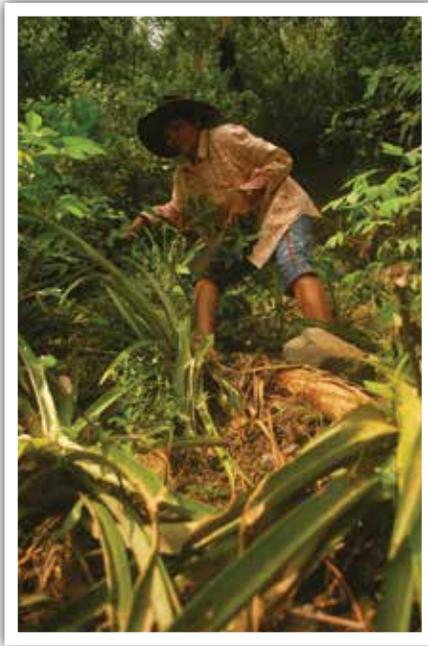
**CONTINUING STRUGGLE**

From her journal entries, 62-year old Margie Tagapan at first seems like an ordinary woman, busy with the daily tasks of running a household and making a living. Margie lives in San Rafael village, town of Rodriguez in the province of Rizal, Philippines.

“Upon waking up in the morning I swept the backyard, and watered my plants. After that, I went down the river to pick fresh vegetables from my garden on the river banks and at the same time cleaned and removed weeds from my garden,” she wrote.

The next day, she wrote again, “It’s Sunday. I woke up at dawn and went to the public market in town to buy goods that I will sell. Arriving home, I only had breakfast and off I went peddling my goods and wares to my neighbors and around the community.”

But on the fourth day, the entry on her journal reads: “I went to collect payments to the credits incurred by members from the Amihan cooperative rice store that I manage. After collecting their payments, I went to the market to buy rice, which I will sell and also so that members can obtain rice credits again. This is one of the help and assistance that I and the rice store provide to members: if they do not have money to buy



rice, the cooperative rice store extends rice credits to them, which they then pay, when they have money, usually in one week’s time.”

The rice cooperative is managed by Margie and was conceived by Amihan, a national organisation of peasant women in the Philippines. The cooperative sells rice at a very low cost. It helps the whole community secure rice for their own needs.

Since joining Amihan, Margie has transformed herself from the “loan shark” whom the community feared, into a leader whom people can trust to look after their welfare.

Margie hails from the town of Sipalay, province of Negros Occidental in Visayas. She and her siblings were raised from the sweat and toil of their parents, who were sugarcane plantation workers. She worked as a sacada in the vast sugar plantations owned by big landlords, earning only Php 2.50 (USD 0.057) per day for several years. In 1979, she left her hometown



and decided to migrate to Rodriguez, Rizal in Luzon, with the hope of finding a better life.

Margie's husband became one of the beneficiaries of an agrarian reform law passed during the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, and they were awarded a three-hectare land. They tilled the land and made it productive with rice, peanuts, and an assortment of vegetables and root crops. With their diligent work, they were able to send their children to elementary and high school.

However, in 1994, the land awarded to them was claimed by a prominent landlord family in the country, the Roxas-Aranetas. Faced with the threat of landgrabbing, Margie rose to leadership in her community. She mobilised people, and led pickets in front of the Department of Agrarian Reform and the courts to press for their land rights. The case is ongoing and up to the Supreme Court for final decision.

Today, Margie leads farmers against the quarrying operations that destroy their lands. They fear that a landslide that will bury the entire community is an imminent possibility if quarrying operations don't stop. In April last year, Margie led a hundred residents, mostly women and children, in a march up the hill where the quarrying operations were. They showed government





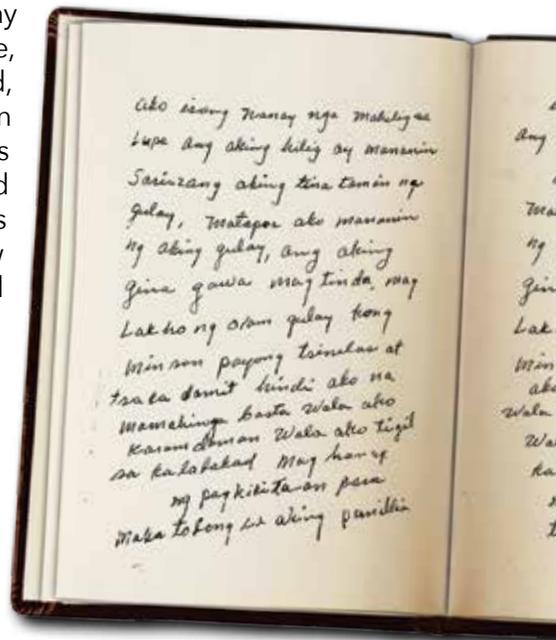
officials the impacts of blasting and quarrying, and were able to temporarily stop the company's operations.

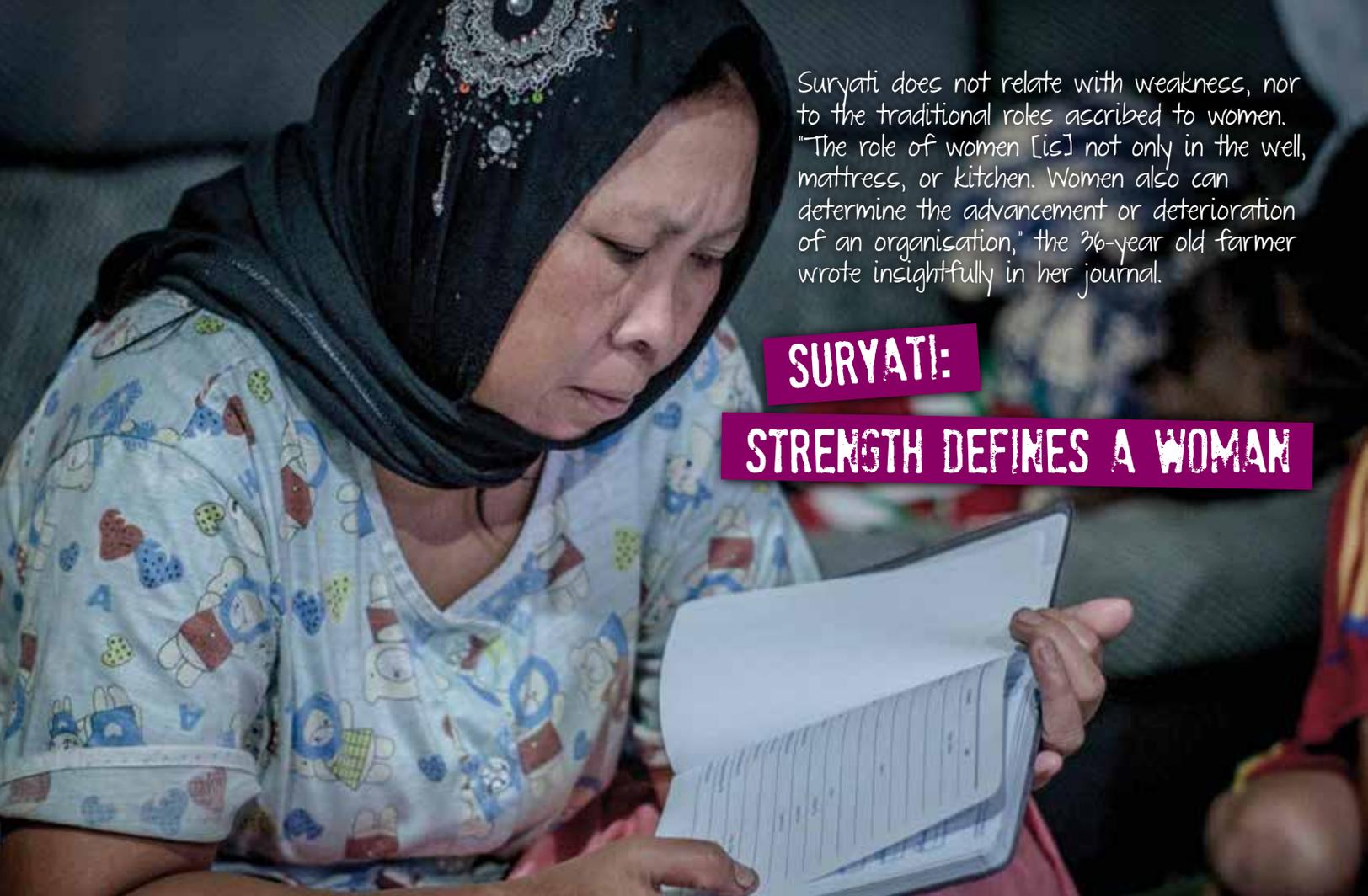
When Amihan started organising the community, Margie was notorious for being a loan shark. She was in frequent altercation with several people in the community, even engaging in fist fights. But her ways were reformed when she became a member of Amihan. Slowly, she imbibed the values of serving the people and the masses, and eventually earned their love and respect.

Margie is now half deaf, and suffers a lot of health problems. But she is unstoppable. She writes in the

journal, "I am worried that now some people in the community have been given jobs by the company doing the quarrying; there are just a few of us left fighting. But the dynamite blasting of the mountains continues, the transport of the rocks to the crusher where the rocks are pounded to small pieces, continues everyday." So does Margie's struggle continues.

After the 10-day writing experience, Margie revealed, "When my children learned of this project, they offered to help me write this journal. They know that I only finished grade 3 at the elementary level. But I declined. I wanted to write in the journal myself. I wanted to write what I want to put in this journal."





Suryati does not relate with weakness, nor to the traditional roles ascribed to women. "The role of women [is] not only in the well, mattress, or kitchen. Women also can determine the advancement or deterioration of an organisation," the 36-year old farmer wrote insightfully in her journal.

**SURYATI:**

**STRENGTH DEFINES A WOMAN**

Suryati knows that from experience. A community leader in Pangalengan, a municipality in Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia, she has been a member of the organisation Seruni for eight years, working on land rights issues.

Land in Pangalengan is fertile, and so are the conditions for struggle. Majority of the land is now under the control of a few companies such as PTPN VIII (tea plantation), Perhutani (forestry), PDAP (agriculture and mining), and Alba (milk farm). An energy company is also currently doing exploration for geothermal energy.

Meanwhile, majority of farmers only own 0.2 hectares per family. Many don't have any land at all. They are forced to sell their labour at a cheap price and with discrimination against women. The average wage for men farmworkers is 15.000 IDR (1.6 USD) per day and 13.000 IDR (1.4 USD) per day for women.

In her journal, Suryati writes about the joy of seeing her plants thrive, plants such as white mustards, tomatoes and chili. She looks back with gratefulness at how being in an organisation helped her regain her family's land. "I already have land [because of organisational] struggle, I am not a farm worker anymore." She recounts that before

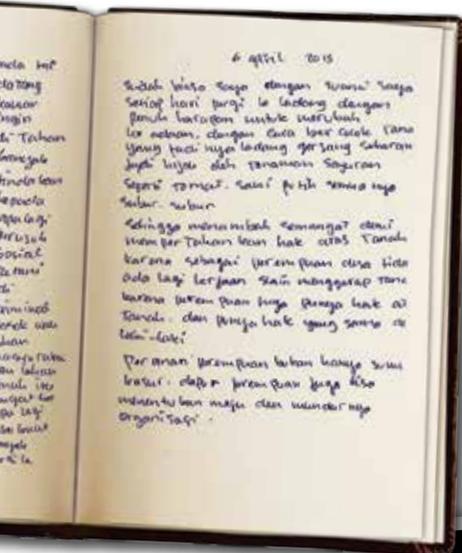
the organisation, lots of rural women went to work to the city, or even went abroad to work as a migrant worker. "But they just sold their life because the government considers women as weak," she wrote.

Hailing from a poor peasant family, hard work is something that comes very naturally to Suryati. "After finishing my early morning prayer, as usual I do the domestic work and

taking care of my two youngest children. After that I go to the farm to do work there such as hoeing, planting and also spraying plants. After all that is finished, I went home and prepared food for my children and husband," she wrote.

But work for her does not only mean farm production and domestic chores, but also assisting fellow farmers, especially those who are being repressed.





On April 7, Suryati and her friends went to visit two farmers who are in jail for their political beliefs, Momo bin Toi and Yana bin Momo, who are also father and son. Suryati wrote, "There's a lot of discussion on the government's actions, which are not

people. For rural people, the land is really important, [it is] the soul of farmers. Especially for rural women, the land is a basic need to fulfill daily needs."

Momo and Yana were the two farmers accused of rioting or throwing stones at the office of PDAP (West Java Province Company on Agriculture and Mining). Since 2005, PDAP has tried to forcibly grab 135 hectares of land from farmers, even bulldozing their plants. The incident for which Momo and Yana are in jail happened last September 2011, when PDAP made renewed attempts to grab land and the people resisted.

In the journal, Suryati tells of how they visited Momo and Yana's family, who feel "sick and sad" at being left behind. She said, "The children really feel sad. They are asking about their father to their mother." The organisation's members are meanwhile doing their best to comfort the family, raising money amongst themselves to ease the family's burden, but more importantly, raising their spirits with hope and optimism.

Suryati herself is suffused with a lot of optimism. "It's usual for me and my husband every day going to the field, bringing hope to change our condition by farming. The field that used to be dry now is green with



pro-people. Farmers are considered as rioters, whereas the farmers are social patriots. Farmers are being criminalised and even being killed."

She added, "Criminalisation of farmers happens in every corner or province, because of land conflict with a company or [feudal landlord]. Whereas [it is really farmers] who need the land, the land belongs to the



*In the glorious morning  
I went to the farm field  
To hoe and plant  
Don't know weary, don't know tired  
Every day going to the farm field  
To farm out the struggle land  
Although many obstacle  
But rural women always going to the farm field  
Oh! Rural women  
Arise united clench your hand  
To fight anti-people regime*

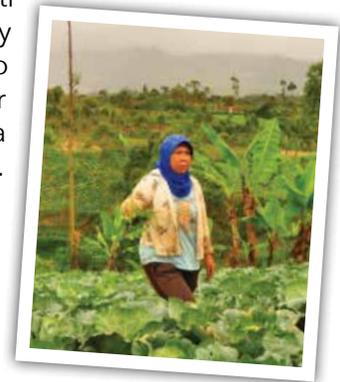
Indeed, Suryati is a woman defined by her strength.

vegetables plants such as tomatoes and white mustard. This increases our spirit to defend our right to land. For rural women, there's no other job aside from tilling the land. Women also have rights to land, and have equal rights with men," she said.

Suryati's husband, Sutarman, is also a peasant leader of Aliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria (AGRA) or Alliance of Agrarian Reform Movement. They have four children.

Fully satisfied with her life as a mother, leader, and farmer, she wrote a few verses to encapsulate her joy and agitation:

After writing the journal, Suryati said she felt shy because many people will read it. But she also felt excited, knowing that her experiences will be part of a global campaign for rural women. She hopes that land reform will be a reality in the future. "It's okay for me when people read my writing, as long as my writing will contribute to changes," she said.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a leopard print long-sleeved top, is shown from the chest up. She is looking slightly to her left with a thoughtful expression. Her hands are positioned near a cluster of green plants with small white flowers. The background is a lush green field with similar plants and some blurred structures in the distance.

## ZIZHEN'S SONG

50-year old Li Zizhen is passionate about her love for her native village and minority culture. She is so passionate that she wrote the song Beautiful Chenguan, together with her daughter, Li Juan:

*Chenguan's scenery is infinitely beautiful.  
White walls, blue roofs, village homes.  
Mi Ju River's water nourishes us,  
lotus ponds in the land of milk and honey.  
Garlic, onions sold abroad,  
milk, rushan,\* renowned far and wide.  
Blue sky, clean water, healthy land,  
streets crowded with people coming and going.  
Reforming San Nong\* with the love of the Party,  
casting off poverty and strengthening China.  
This year is the Imjin Lunar Year,  
in Fall we celebrate the National Congress.\*  
Looking back at this new village we built,  
amazing achievements and glory.  
Guests come and don't want to leave,  
farmers go to the city to find work, but yearn to come home early.  
Every season is like Spring,  
it is a joy to live in the world of Chenguan.*

*\*rushan is a traditional Bai minority cheese made from sour milk  
\*"San Nong," the "Three Issues of Agriculture" in China -  
agriculture, countryside, and farmer.  
\*The annual conference: National Congress of the Communist Party  
of China*

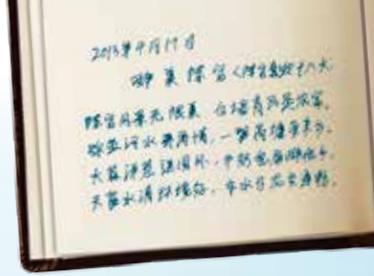


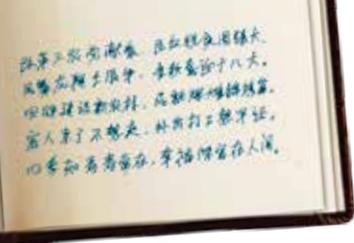
Zizhen also described the various issues facing the village. Since the introduction of the use of chemical fertilisers, farmers are no longer able to use their livestock's manure as natural fertilisers. "There is animal manure all over the roads. When it rains, cars cannot pass through. But if not on the roadside, where can we put it? We can only fertilise our fields with the manure during the transplant rice seedlings season. All other times we cannot," she said. Hygiene thus remains a considerable problem in Chenguan, brought about by the use of chemical fertilisers.

The problem with drought, which has now lasted four years in the Yunnan province, is also serious. Zizhen recalls that before 1980, the Mi Ju River provided the village with an abundant supply of water. Now, because of climate change, the water level has significantly dropped. "The water is so low that we can no longer draw water from the wells," she wrote.

She also observed that the government has not employed party members, seven of which are women, to pump water. "I estimate that every party member would have to draw water for 30 days each in order to guarantee the villagers sufficient water for one year," Zizhen wrote.

The farmer noted some positive changes with respect to the village's use of chemical pesticides. Nowadays, with the help of organisations such as Eco-Women,





people are more aware of their adverse impacts on health and the environment. "With



and natural resources. "Dali's orchids and tea flowers are as beautiful as Bai women: slim and graceful, charming and delicate. Every year we welcome guests from far away," she wrote.

vegetables especially, pesticides are used sparingly. Pregnant women in particular avoid using pesticides. More attention is paid to human health. Everyone knows to wear gloves and masks when applying pesticides. The bottles and packaging are not thrown in the fields; they are disposed of in trash bags. Everyone is protecting the environment," she happily observed. The community organises trainings to reduce pesticides risks, as well as to eliminate its use.

The experience of writing in the journal made Zizhen euphoric in the end. She expressed her excitement about learning from the stories of other rural women, and about the potential of her own stories to help others. "I have forgotten how to write many words. I should be writing and learning constantly," she said, reflecting on the process. Indeed, Zizhen could write even more songs, and inspire even more women going through rural life.

Lastly, Zizhen wrote excitedly about the upcoming Bai minority festival and its famous 1000-year-old market. The ancient festival and market is held in Dali, a village that is an hour south of Chenguan. "This festival, san yue jie, opens grandly, with people from all the villages, towns, and counties coming to perform, with call-and-response songs and horse races," she described.

Chinese medicine and agricultural products, local specialty crafts and handiwork, as well as other products are sold here. Zizhen is obviously proud of this tradition, which is a chance to showcase the best of their culture



## SIYAT'S WAY TOWARDS GREATER PRODUCTIVITY

The daily life of Chey Siyat consists mostly of hard work and long meetings. But such work, devoted to solving the question of how to raise productivity, is not fruitless. In fact, it is through persistence, organisation, and creativity that her Khmer family and community are able to surpass threats to livelihood.



Siyat is a 56-year old woman living in the Damnak Kantourt commune, Kampong Trach district, Kampot province in Cambodia. She has been a leader of the Kasikor Samaki Meanchey Association or Farmer Solidarity Association for seven years. This association is part of a larger network of 1,100 village-based farmer associations initiated by CEDAC (Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture).

Siyat starts her journal by writing about the livelihood problems that they encounter. "According to my observation, the difference between the last five years and now is that crop production had suffered from fast climate change." She observed that most farmers cannot produce enough supply for their own consumption and market needs, mainly because of lack of water resources for irrigation. Siyat added, "Vegetable and fruits need to be sold immediately after harvest because we don't have knowledge about food processing to keep them for long-time or to add value. [Meanwhile], during the harvest season, produce floods

the market, and the middlemen give farmers a very low price. This makes farmers especially women who are responsible for selling their products, reluctant to continue production." This low production and income forces many girls and young women to look for jobs outside the community.



However, Siyat believes that productivity can be raised by adequate planning, both at the household and at the community level. In this, women play a very big role. She wrote, "A household that wants to improve their living condition has to start from an activity plan for crop planting and animal raising. They have to assign a task for each family member. The preparation

of a family development plan requires the participation of women in [the decision-making] process because women manage their family daily living and income and expense, and they know well the results/outcomes from implementing the plan... However, most women in the community have not yet [paid attention to these] because women don't recognise that they play a main role in family and community development. In most

families, women aren't confident because they think that planning and decision-making is the role of their husbands."

Siyat encouraged the participation of women in the association. Out of its 102 members, 76 of them are women, with many of them at the leadership level. Through the organisation, women in the commune gain more courage to speak out, exchange knowledge and share their problems and opinions with others.

She wrote about their experience in collectively finding ways to increase productivity and income. "We apply the technical knowledge we learnt, such as the rice planting technique following the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), vegetable production for home consumption and

sale of the surplus for income, and joining our savings in a self-reliance group." Under Siyat's leadership, the association's members have put up their own capital in a saving and credits groups, under which they can save and borrow money for investment in agriculture production and their family's needs.

Siyat's own family has seen an improvement in livelihood. Mainly because of ecologically sound agricultural techniques that she has adopted, such as SRI, her 1.25 hectare of rice land produces around four to five tons per year. Additional income from vegetable growing and livestock keeping makes her family live moderately well. Her family was able to build a biogas plant for cooking and lighting and a restroom for sanitation, which is often unaffordable for most rural families in the country.





In her journal entries, Siyat describes some of her practices in detail: "11th May from 9 am to 11 am: Selecting rice seed and picked the full grain for planting in the coming season. According to my experience, such seed selection produces more yield, with about 15% increase. With little extra time to select full grain and pure seeds, it can also improve the quality of the grain."

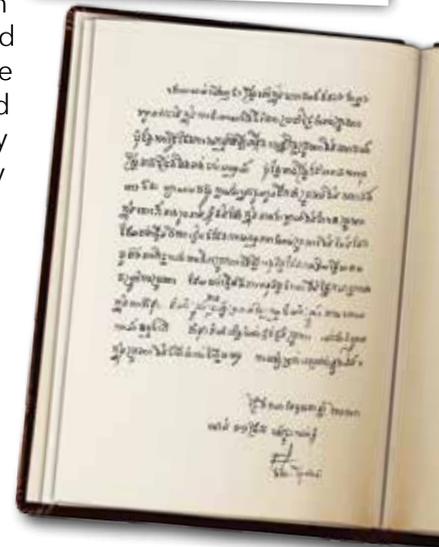
Another journal entry reads: "12th May from 7 am to 9 am: Raising up the paddy field dike to harvest rain water in the field which is important for growing rice in the rainy season as we don't have water reservoir to irrigate the field when there is no rain."

Siyat also describes how working together as a community is crucial. "18th May from 8am to 11 am: Meeting with Agriculture Development Cooperative Committee to discuss on organic rice production plan in the coming season. Having a cooperative in community can help the community members sell their paddy with

a good price, and they also have a chance to prepare production plan and discuss the strengths and weakness to improve its implementation," she wrote.

It is also crucial to work together as a family. She wrote, "Every day between 4:30 pm and 6:50 pm, my household members gather at home and we discuss on daily family expense and income, then record the figure on a household financial notebook. By doing so, it makes us easy to reduce unnecessary items, to find ways to increase income, as well as to increase capital for investment."

Tight planning and organisation—such is Siyat's way towards a better life for her family and community.



# SHANTHI: LIBERATING DALIT WOMEN

Forty six year-old Shanthi Gangadaran does not use much words to describe her days. But it is evident she is a very important and inspiring figure in the community, sought after by Dalit women who are among the most oppressed in Indian society



Shanthi is a coordinator of the Rural Women's Liberation Movement, an organisation that has been mobilising rural women for several decades. She lives in a village of Dalits in Tamil Nadu.

Dalits are considered as "untouchables" in the Indian caste system. They are among the poorest farmers, having no land. Most work as agricultural workers, depending mostly on low wages given by big landlords who control land and other natural resources. Many Dalits also work as sweepers and drainage and household cleaners. From childhood, Dalits are discriminated against, and usually only attain primary education. It is estimated that there are 260 million Dalits in South Asia.

As a Dalit, Shanthi also only reached ninth grade. But the lack of higher education and better economic opportunities did not deter her from taking on responsibilities traditionally not associated with women. As a rural woman leader, Shanthi organises Dalit women to get land and housing rights, to do collective farming without the use of pesticides, and to participate in local governance. She organises village meetings, trainings, demonstrations, land surveys, and food festivals. As a woman leader, she also assists victims and survivors of violence against women.

In a journal entry last June 9, Shanthi recalled how a 22-year old woman named Ambika sought her help after being beaten by a man that

she lived with. Ambika was left by her husband for another woman and with her parents' permission lived with another man. However, she became yet another victim of abuse. "This man doubted Ambika and beat her every day. She said that she was not in a position to live with him anymore. I advised and counseled Ambika," Shanthi wrote.

Shanthi is encouraged by how women are now engaging in collective organic farming, after having struggled for their rights to land. "Morning 8 o'clock I went to Malla Reddy Kandigai. Andhra government has given 45 women land 'Pattas' in their own names. Since these lands are at hilly regions, I suggested them to do collective agriculture. When I talked to the women there, the women said that they wanted to make their land



more fertile. They also wanted to do natural agriculture using Pseudomonas. [A kind of bacteria that can be used to kill fungi that attacks plants -Ed.] Mainly they wanted to plant millet seeds," she wrote last June 14.

In another journal entry, she told of how the Maharajapuram Rural Women Agricultural Development Movement was launched. The movement aims to fight for women's land rights, and develop women's interest in organic agriculture by bringing back the "glories" of traditional agriculture. "We insisted that the government should give land 'Pattas' (land rights) in the women's name and that the women should come forward as a team to do organic agriculture. The women in this

village welcomed this new idea and appreciated it," Shanthi wrote happily.

Shanthi also helps farmers in their struggle against land grabbing. In Paranchi Pirka where there are more than 53 villages, a total of 5,300 acres were about to be looted by the government. "The government took these lands and laid the basement for the SIPCOT factory. But the people there stood against it and stopped it," Shanthi said. Last June 5, she went to Mittapettai village and taught Dalit women to do collective farming, so as to reap the gains of their land struggle more effectively.

The next day, in the Palavoy Center, Shanthi talked to several farmers about various problems, such as



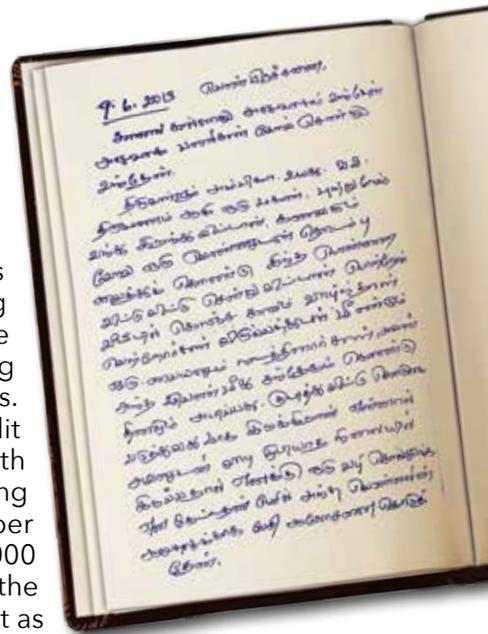
land grabbing and heavy interests for loans. In India, hundreds of thousands of farmers have committed suicide by drinking pesticides, because of their inability to pay loans. These loans are linked to the high costs of inputs and usurious rates charged by loan sharks.

Shanthi shared a story of how in Muthur village, the wife of one farmer committed suicide because “she was not in a position to repay [her loans],” she said. The woman died in a second suicide attempt. Her first suicide attempt failed, and her relatives got a new loan to repay the old loans. However, when the farmer still couldn’t pay the loans, his wife decided to kill herself again. It was a tragic story, one that Shanthi encounters many times in her work as a leader.



In her journal, Shanthi also described an incident last April 25, when petrol bombs were thrown by

unidentified men at 11 Dalit huts in Marakkanam village. Shanthi’s mother organisation, the Tamil Nadu Women’s Forum, is petitioning against the violence and harassment being committed against Dalits. Harassment of the Dalit families continue, with men forcibly collecting Rs.15,000 commission per family, from the Rs.50,000 that was given by the Tamil Nadu Government as compensation.



For the rest of the week, Shanthi also met with theological students, oversaw the cultivation of a 10-acre land, and talked to women vendors grappling with the increased prices of vegetables.

In her journal, Shanthi also posted photos of her daily activities, showing her in a leadership role and with her family, a woman liberated like how she would like all of her people to be.

## AMARA SEIZES THE DAY

Gunawathi "Amara" Hewagallage's life is exceptionally active. Every single day seems to be devoted to an important undertaking, with little or no time for rest.



Amara is a famous community leader from Maligavilla, Monaragala District of Sri Lanka. She is a president of the Community Resource Protection Centre (CRPC), and has been for the past 15 years. The CRPC is a local non-government organisation (NGO) that works for the empowerment of rural women and promotes biodiversity-based ecological agriculture. Her organisation also works on land rights, and campaigns against pesticides and genetic engineering.

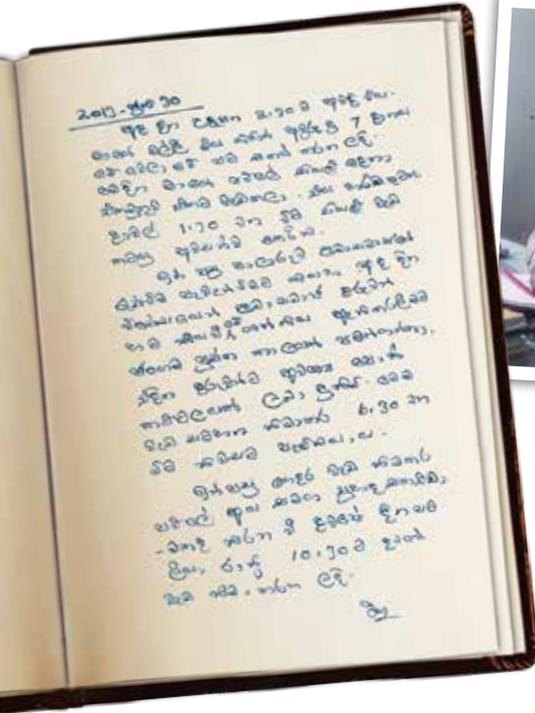
Amara's devotion to her work is evident. Her journal entries show a glimpse of the life of an extremely busy woman, obviously valued highly by her family, community, and country.

Amara's family is a family of community activists. She considers her family members, such as her sister Chandra, as among her earliest political influences. From a young age, she has been taught how to be socially aware and involved. "Since 1979, our community has faced so many challenges in our day-to-day life. Around the country there are so many conflicts, such as land issues, and [the struggle for] women's and girls' rights, food sovereignty, and human rights. Through



these challenges, I [saw] the need to change society and do service to the community. That's how I became a community activist," Amara explained.

As a community leader, Amara leads in lobbying efforts with the government. "I met the Agrarian Services Commissioner to discuss about reservations and estimates in the new project regarding climate change...After that I went to meet the District Register to discuss about promoting a biodiversity-based ecological agriculture (BEA) system in villages," she wrote on June 24. She said that she was pleased with her accomplishments for the day.



Many of Amara’s activities are part of collective efforts by several communities to address climate change and ensure food security and sovereignty. During the 12 days in which the journal was in her possession, she was able to organise, attend, or launch a seed exchange, a seed bank, a workshop on BEA and climate change, a food exhibition, an organic market, a homeopathic clinic, a visit to a water conservation area, a children’s library, a video screening on home gardening, and a District NGO meeting.

The next day, she met with around 300 farmers to discuss land issues in the areas of Weheragala and Thethagal Landa. Together,

She describes her endeavours and motivations in simple words, and always in relation with the community. For instance, in the District NGO meeting she attended, she was elected Treasurer. She said, “We need to make a big contribution, and the best place to achieve this is the NGO movement.” After a successful food exhibition, she said, “Personally I was happy because all the



they drafted a letter to the Minister and other government officials, appealing for land ownership to the farmers of these communities. “I took part in the leadership of this work and I gave my support and ideas [for the letter],” she proudly wrote.

women took part in the valuable event.” In Niyadalla where a seed bank was launched, she expressed faith that the women “will exchange seeds with other villages and make the seed bank success.”

Amara works efficiently, making the most out of her time and effort. For instance, before her trip in the afternoon to the Madu Hel Mountain, a water conservation area, she stopped by in the morning to a Galabadda Nursery to get several plants “suitable for growth in the area.” In a workshop on BEA and climate change in Sama Mawatha, she taught both “practical and theoretical knowledge” to women farmers. They tackled not only economic, health, and environmental challenges that they face, but also “mental and attitude challenges.” They finished the workshop with a session on how to make organic compost.

Amara also oversaw the production of eco-friendly products, as part of a self-employment programme that she created. Products are sold in a shop that is run by community members.

In one journal entry, Amara described with pride an organic market that they hold every Friday of the week:

“I created this market with women farmers because they can sell their organic products to the community and they can earn money. This is a solution for our economic problem. First we started in the village level, and we want to make it big and spread all over the country.” At the end of the day, she said that she was very tired. “But I am very happy because all of my products I sold out.”

Tired but happy seems to describe Amara’s feeling at the end of each productive day.



## TIJA'S GARDEN

Tija Anak Mang's fruit and vegetable garden and rice farm is part of what is left of the Iban's ancestral land in a village called Bangit in Sibuan, Sarawak, the largest state in Malaysia found in the island of Borneo.



Over the years, much of the indigenous Iban's resource-rich lands have been converted to palm oil plantations, through encroachments that farmers like Tija strive to defend themselves against everyday.

Tija, 52, is a member of SADIA (Sarawak Dayak Iban Association), a non-government organisation of indigenous peoples fighting for native customary rights to land. Upon her own initiative, Tija formed a women farmers group whose members are both Iban and Melanau, indigenous peoples who have resided in Sarawak's rainforests for centuries.

Sarawak's rainforests are vanishing fast. Around 70% of the land area in Sarawak has been leased to logging companies, which pave the way for the entry of palm oil plantations. The Sarawak state government plans to develop 1.5 million hectares of ancestral lands into palm oil plantations.

Through journal entries depicting rural life, Tija shows why farmers like her fight tooth-and-nail to keep their own land, which is the source of their food, peace, and security.

Tija's daily routine consists of going to her fruit and vegetable garden and rice farm, weeding or clearing

the grass. For her, this routine is priceless, a testament of how they are able to preserve their way of life. "Today I go to my corn garden to see if there are any sprouting seeds that needs to be replanted. Then I clear the weeds. I have quite a number of native lands inherited from my ancestors, as I never sold off or surrendered any of these to any oil palm company. Instead, I along with other villagers defend our native lands. Because of that none of my family members became cheap labour in the oil palm plantations, because we have our own source of income from our own lands," she said.

This pride in food security and income, which comes from having land, is evident in many journal entries. "Today I'm harvesting fruits like bananas, vegetables like pumpkins and green leaves. Some of these are for sale. I don't have to waste my money to buy



vegetables," she wrote on July 19. On July 21, she wrote, "This morning I accompanied one of my sons to our sago garden...he wants to fell the sago trees for sale. Our main income in this area is from sago palm, cutting them into portions of 2 ½ feet and selling them to the sago factory. One sago tree can be cut into at least 14 portions." Another source of income she identified is the jute, a kind of wild plant that is used for mats, flooring, baskets and other handicrafts.

Like most Ibans, Tija lives in a longhouse along the mighty Igan river. The river remains a major part of the Iban's way of life. This is where they bathe and collect water for household use. It is also an excellent source of food. "In the evening I go to the river to catch fish or prawns for dinner. We still can catch a lot of fish or prawns and the



Nonetheless, Tija is doing her best to ensure that her garden and farm remains chemical-free. In her rice farm,

river is still clean, as we are fighting against the oil palm companies that pollute our rivers," Tija wrote.

Also like most indigenous peoples, the Ibans are bereft of social services. To go to their farms, they have to take an outboat, as there is no road access. "We are far behind development--no electricity and pipe water supply," she added.

Pollution from surrounding palm oil plantations, which are heavy users of pesticides, is a huge concern for the Ibans. It is especially worrisome for Tija, who is practicing organic agriculture and encouraging other farmers to do the same. Her farm is only separated from the plantation by an irrigation duct, which she fears will become polluted as well.

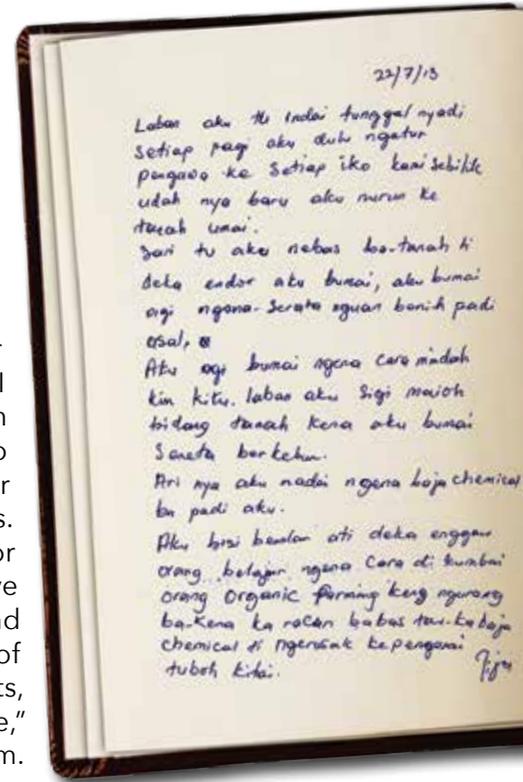
she practices shifting cultivation and preserves original rice seedlings. In her fruit and vegetable garden, she does not use a weed killer, and instead clears the grass with a long knife. She yearns to gain more knowledge in organic composting and agriculture.

Tija gave a glimpse of their continuing struggle against land grabbing. "At one stage we fought against an oil palm company encroaching into our native customary lands. One of our fellow villagers was arrested by the police. However, we were not intimidated by the police, instead we decided to resist the company. The police are obviously in favour of the company. We lodged a police report but this is being ignored, and we continue to struggle to defend our native customary lands."



One day, while harvesting fruits and vegetables with her neighbours, Tija kept reminding them why it is important to keep struggling, and to keep enhancing their capacity to fight. "I told them why I am always going out to attend seminars or paralegal workshops. I come to know or learn about our native customary rights and human rights, right of speech, women rights, and other knowledge," she explained to them.

Even from inside her own garden, Tija is trying to show other women the struggle that lies beyond.





**HUONG'S HOME**

**AND COMMUNITY**

Bui Thi Huong was anxious at first when she was handed the travelling journal by her colleague, Ngoc, of the non-government organisation Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED). "I was afraid that I couldn't do it because so far I have never written a diary," she said. But when she learned that fellow farmers from across Asia have already written in the journal, she was challenged to give a voice to the Vietnamese women.

Huong is the president of the Women's Union of the Hai Van commune, Hai Hau district, Nam Dinh province of Vietnam. Among the Catholic community in her commune, she is known to have become the first Communist Party member and to hold a leadership position in the local government.

Huong's tasks include advocating for national policies, attracting women to become members of the union, raising the awareness on family planning, and protecting women and children against violence. Sometimes, her own house becomes a shelter for women who are survivors of domestic violence.

In her first entry, Huong told of how she presided over a meeting of the local Party branch, consisting of 13 officers. They talked about accomplishing several "local political, economical and social aims" to improve rural conditions, including social work and health insurance.

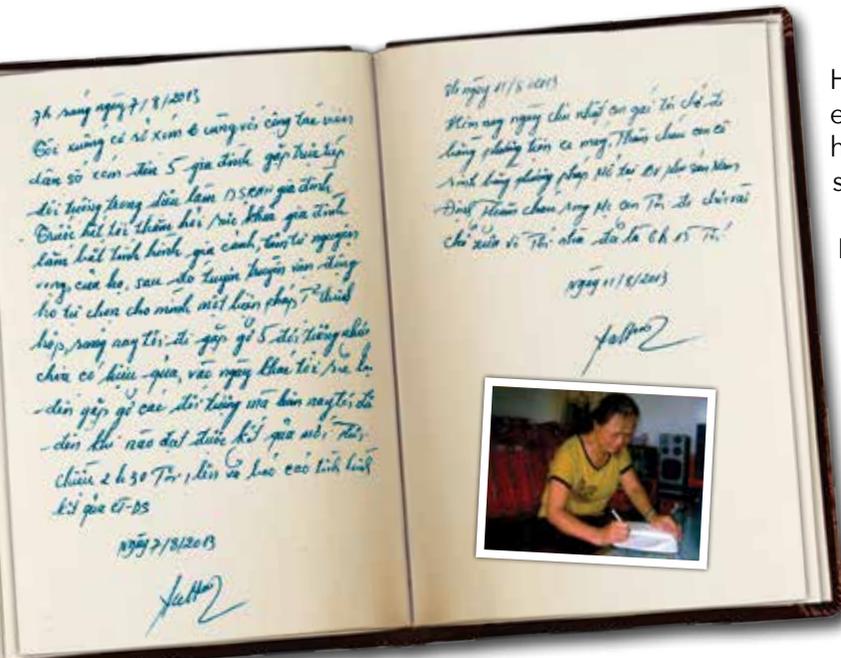
The next couple of days, however, Huong became preoccupied with personal matters, particularly, her mother-in-law's 3rd death anniversary. In her diary, she recalled the day that her mother died with sorrowful and poetic detail, as if it were yesterday. "That night,



everybody took shifts and looked after her, but I, I didn't want to leave her for any minute as I was afraid I wouldn't have chance to see her in her last minute. I kept staying near her, reading her

the bible. I gave her a massage, afraid that she'd take a life-long deep sleep. I came close to her ears, and called 'Mother!' I gently stroked her cotton-like white hair and her ears. She slightly opened her eyes, whistling, 'Thank you!' I was crying and I told her, 'Mother, don't say a thing like that! I feel so sad, I'm the one who must say thank you. What you have been giving me is countless, greater than that blue sky and that deep sea, I will never be able to pay for that.'"

Huong described with much tenderness how much she appreciated her mother-in-law for giving birth to her



Huong said, "Today I was exhausted but I am very happy for having done spiritual work."



In the family, she and her husband treat each other like equals. All decisions are made by discussion, and not just by one person. Huong also manages the financial matters of the family.

It is this warmth and leadership within the home that she brings to the wider community. On August 5, she went to the funeral of an old man. On August 7, she met with five households to give advice on family planning. "At first, I ask about the family's health to catch up with their household, their thoughts and hopes. After that I started to approach them, so that they can pick for themselves a compatible contraception," she said. On August 9, she went house-to-house, collecting donations for a child who was crippled by a car accident.

The Hai Van commune is a rice-growing community. As with any other rice-growing community, farmers are

husband. "She brought him to life to put my hand into his, giving me a half of my flesh. Every one of us always wants to find that person that you grow up with. I've been always happy and satisfied when I have her and my husband by my side," she said.

After a busy day cooking and preparing for the feast held in commemoration of her mother-in-law's death,

burdened with the use of chemical inputs. It is estimated that farmers use about 1,200 kg of pesticide per year for agricultural production.

Huong is among those women who pioneered trainings on Integrated Pest Management and System of Rice Intensification, through farmer field schools. In the field schools, gender and environmental issues are discussed hand-in-hand. Among Huong's achievements as president of the Women's Union is to organise the No Pesticides Use Week in Hai Van, involving many women. The women demand accessible and affordable agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilisers, and irrigation), and less use of highly toxic pesticides.

The struggle to become less dependent on pesticides is continuing. In one journal entry, Huong wrote, "I go to the paddy field for a while. It's the first full month from the day we started to grow rice and now it has covered all the surface of the land, but mice devastated the field very badly. I'm going to buy rat poison to kill them, however, my neighbor told me a tip to solve this

problem: to get some wreaths on the new grave and then place them at the rice field. I followed his advice."

Huong also spent some time overseeing the construction of a road and drainage channels, which are meant to "build a new countryside." "I am excited about the new concrete road, which have contributions of the local people," she shared.



On the last day of writing, Huong bid an affectionate farewell to the journal, and to all the other rural women who shared their words and photographs in it. She said of the women, "You and I don't speak same languages but we are on the same way. Hope that someday we will meet again."

After writing in the journal, Huong also said that she learned many lessons about her own life in the process. "Through each day, in the evening...I was wondering what I have done, where I have to go, how much the work was [done] efficiently, what made me happy, what made me sad...I found that the diary gave me a very interesting daily habit." But more than anything, it satisfied Huong that her "simple and rustic words" will travel all over the world.



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# Jurnal Snapshot



*Collaborating  
Groups*





## ARWC

The Asian Rural Women's Coalition (ARWC) is a growing movement of women peasants, agricultural women workers, indigenous women, Dalit women, nomads, fisherfolk, informal and formal workers, migrants and advocates calling for rural women's Rights, Empowerment and Liberation! It was established in March 2008 in Tamil Nadu, India with more than 700 women from grassroots organisations and support NGOs coming from 21 countries in Asia.

One of ARWC's core strategies is to consolidate rural women's organisations and movements to defend the economic, social and cultural rights of communities - from rights to food, land, water, territories, productive resources, traditional knowledge, health and nutrition, education, to decent income and jobs as well as civil and political rights including right to self-determination. It continues to build solidarity and unity through exchanges, leadership building, use of information tools, coordinated campaigns and policy advocacy work. It continues to consolidate rural women in Asia to resist imperialist globalisation towards ending exploitation, discrimination, oppression and violence in all forms.

ARWC is represented by a Steering Committee of national women's alliances and regional women's organisations in Asia: Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED) and Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF), India; Tenaganita, Malaysia; Human Development Organization (HDO), Sri Lanka; INNABUYOG and GABRIELA National Alliance of Women's Organization, Philippines; All Nepal Women's Alliance (ANWA), Nepal; Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD); Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW); Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM ASIA); International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR); and Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP, and as Secretariat to the ARWC).

**[www.asianruralwomen.net](http://www.asianruralwomen.net)**



## **PANAP**

Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) is one of the five regional centres of Pesticide Action Network (PAN), a global network dedicated primarily towards the elimination of harm caused to humans and the environment by pesticides and towards promoting biodiversity-based ecological agriculture.

PAN AP's vision is of a society that is truly democratic and culturally diverse, based on the principles of food sovereignty, gender justice and environmental sustainability. PAN AP has developed strong partnerships with peasants, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, rural women movements and other small food producers in the Asia Pacific region. Guided by the strong leadership of these grassroots groups, PAN AP has become a strong advocacy network with a firm Asian perspective.

Our mission lies in strengthening people's movements to advance and assert food sovereignty, promote biodiversity based ecological agriculture and the empowerment of rural women; protect people and the environment from highly hazardous pesticides; defend the rice heritage of Asia and resist the threats of corporate agriculture and neo-liberal globalisation.

Currently PAN AP comprises 108 network partner organisations in the Asia-Pacific region and links with other civil society and grassroots organisations, regionally and globally.

**[www.panap.net](http://www.panap.net)**



**OXFAM** OXFAM

Oxfam is a global movement for change - a network that empowers individuals, communities and organisations to build a future free from injustice and poverty.

An international confederation of 17 organizations working in approximately 90 countries worldwide to find solutions to poverty and related injustice, Oxfam truly believes that a world without poverty is possible; that everyone has a right to a life worth living; and that with the right support, people can take control, solve their own problems, and become self-reliant and independent. In all Oxfam's actions, the ultimate goal is to enable people to exercise their rights and manage their own lives. Oxfam works directly with communities and seeks to influence the powerful, to ensure that poor people can improve their lives and livelihoods and have a say in decisions that affect them.

**[www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)**



FOOD. LIFE. PLANET.

## THE GROW CAMPAIGN

The GROW campaign aims to transform the food system by establishing sustainable - and environmentally sound - agricultural production that will be able to feed a world population of 9 billion by 2050.

It also aims to address the huge inequalities that exist in the food system. Currently the world produces more food than we need, but nearly 1 billion people go without. And smallholder farmers, who comprise the majority of food producers, are denied the resources they need to thrive - water, land, technology and investment.

It is a campaign that seeks to bring about a shift in global government attitudes to food trade and finance. It focuses on small-scale farming in developing countries, and changing attitudes to the world's scarce resources for a fairer future.

[www.oxfam.org/en/grow](http://www.oxfam.org/en/grow)

## PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

### PHILIPPINES

**AMIHAN (National Federation of Peasant Women)** aims to empower peasant women through alternative development policies and strategies. It advocates equal opportunities and justice for all and strongly condemns human rights violations committed particularly against peasant women. It is also particular in the development concerning agrarian reform. The term AMIHAN describes the southeastern wind during harvest season that characterises peasant women as “gentle but tough, tender but tenacious.” It has 32 provincial sectors in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

***amihan\_psntwmn@yahoo.com***

### CHINA

**Eco-Women** is a women-only volunteer and decision-making network based in Yunnan Province, China, working to address pesticide hazards and women’s health, as well as other broader issues concerning women’s empowerment, sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and the environment. Founded in 2001, Eco-Women works directly with communities and collaborates extensively with other women’s organisations to carry out projects related to Eco-Women’s goals.

***ecowomen.network@gmail.com***

### MALAYSIA

**SADIA (Sarawak Dayak Iban Association)** is an organisation that looks into the affairs of the natives in Sarawak especially the Iban by virtue of customary. It is actively involved

in defending the rights of natives and the indigenous peoples over their native customary rights (NCR) lands being encroached upon by oil palm plantation and timber companies. SADIA is an accredited member of Economic and Social Council of United Nations (ECOSOC), and a member of the Indigenous Peoples’ Network of Malaysia or Jaringan Orang Asal Se-Malaysia (JAOS), an umbrella of 21 community-based non-governmental organisations that focuses its work on indigenous peoples’ issues. It is also a member of Asia Indigenous Peoples’ Pact (AIPP), an organisation of indigenous peoples’ movement in Asia.

SADIA was registered in 1984 with the aim of promoting the usage and the advancement of the Iban language. Its efforts are supported by Iban officers in the Education Department and it bore fruit when the Iban language eventually was included in the primary and secondary schools curriculum.

***sadiahq@gmail.com***

### CAMBODIA

**CEDAC** is a Cambodian NGO specialising in ecologically-sound agriculture and rural development. The organisation was established in 1997 with initial support from the French NGO GRET (Group for Research and Exchange of Technology). CEDAC currently employs around 250 staffs, and most of them are working in the community development projects. Since its inception, CEDAC, working with its partners, has been very successful in achieving the

social mission, especially by providing capacity building support to approximately 150,000 small-scale farmers from 6,176 villages in 593 communes, 131 districts across 22 provinces in Cambodia. These beneficiaries account roughly for 5% of all farming households in the nation. They have improved their socio-economic conditions as a result of cooperating with CEDAC. The most successful agriculture and rural development initiatives implemented by CEDAC are: 1) System of Rice Intensification (SRI), 2) saving for Self-Reliance (SSR) and 3) Linking Organic Farmers to markets (both domestic and international markets, especially in organic rice).

[cedacinfo@cedac.org.kh](mailto:cedacinfo@cedac.org.kh)

## INDONESIA

**Seruni (Indonesian Women's Organization)** is a grassroots-based women's organisation, where majority of its members are rural women. Seruni was established on September 2006 through a national women's conference in Bandung.

Seruni believes that patriarchy is a system of oppression that makes women more vulnerable, more oppressed and exploited. Seruni takes part in strengthening people's movements by demanding gender equality and asserting for better life for the people in terms of economic, social, cultural and political spheres, as well as taking part in people's movement and intensifying women's organising

and participation. Seruni challenges the oppressive and exploitative systems, particularly of women by doing campaign and advocacy strategies and providing alternative framework and solutions. Seruni believes that with a democratic legal movement can we forward women's rights along with rights of other sectors and movements.

[seruni@seruni.org](mailto:seruni@seruni.org)

## VIETNAM

**CGFED** carries out action research and policy advocacy to promote gender equality, a determinant for happiness of individuals, families and communities. CGFED acts for GENDER EQUALITY based on freedom, diversity and human rights. Founded in May 5th, 1993, the Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) has been carrying out social scientific research and intervention activities, targeting at women's development and gender equity. During the period 1993-2010, targeting the promotion of Vietnamese Women's Development and Gender Equity, CGFED have been active in four main areas: research; intervention/application; training; and publication. CGFED has conducted 50 research projects, 20 intervention projects/programmes, released 30 publications, and organised 15 scientific conferences/seminars. In the research activities, CGFED applies an inter-disciplinary approach and gender analysis to the study of women, family and the interaction between social

and natural environment. The focus is on women's roles in the spheres of family, society and the community, the problems of specific groups of women (rural women, poor women, trafficked women, female migrants, etc.), the fields of population and health, especially reproductive health, women and environment issues, and women's human rights issues. CGFED's interventions have been based on the research findings. They have usually been in the form of experimental models carried out at a specific communal site in order to be replicated on a large scale later. The target groups of CGFED's research and intervention activities are mainly women in rural areas, including mountainous, delta and coastal areas.

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## **SRI LANKA**

**Vikalpani National Women Federation** protects environmental and human health from pesticides; empowers rural women who have the greatest risk of exposure to these environmental hazards; and promotes ecological agriculture based on biodiversity to ensure food security and food sovereignty. In 2012, the organisation began to collect information regarding the health of the communities that suffer from pesticide poisoning. Through education and advocacy, the organisation aims to ban highly toxic pesticides from Sri Lanka altogether.

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**The Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF)** is a state-level formation advocating women's rights and gender injustice. It works against all forms of discrimination not only gender-based discrimination, but also caste-based discrimination and discrimination against Dalit women. The TNWF, in advocating for the protection and promotion of women's rights, links up with a wide network of women's, human rights, tribal, Dalit groups, fisher communities, individuals, environmental justice groups and people's movements. With a network of 50 groups when it started in 1991, the TNWF now has more than 375 groups throughout the state of Tamil Nadu. It has a planning committee which consists of 26 members which include trainers, legal advisors and special speakers from all over the state. The planning committee lays down the activities for all the districts and its members lead in the implementation of the plans.

The TNWF's main focus is on the rights of rural women. It facilitates collective articulation and action at the local, district, state and country levels. It initiates campaigns and concerted actions against all forms of violence against women and in sensitizing the public at large on highly exploitative patriarchal social structure. It provides gender support services as and when necessary. It assists grassroots women's organisations at achieving self-reliance through various means.

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# ASIAN RURAL WOMEN'S TRAVELLING JOURNAL

MARCH - AUGUST 2013

This booklet *Our Stories, One Journey: Empowering Rural Women in Asia* is a compilation of feature stories based on journal entries written by eight remarkable women. Rural women from the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, and Sri Lanka each wrote in a 'travelling journal' for ten days. This one-of-a-kind journal was passed on from one woman to the next, capturing the day-to-day activities, thoughts and emotions of one of the most marginalised sectors in Asia.

While playing a significant role in food production, rural women are often invisible and unheard. It is from the essential need to hear and see them better that the idea of a travelling journal was born. The journal, as documented in this booklet, provides a personal account of how women in communities assert their leadership and struggle for change, as they face growing food insecurity caused by global phenomena such as land grabbing, climate change, and corporatisation of agriculture.



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