

# AMRC Southeast Asia Sub Regional Meeting on Sustainable Organization Bangkok, July 4-5, 2012

**July 4, 2012**

The meeting was initiated by AMRC providing overview of “Sustainable Organization” as a continuation of AMRC last three-year program on new ways of organizing and collective bargaining. In this meeting we had participants from Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand who have been working on issues of palm oil plantation. In Indonesia, there are cross-sector alliances have been formed between the landless peasants and the plantation workers. Meanwhile, the Thailand groups are experienced in occupying of plantation land. The meeting also involved groups from Cambodia, which formed a cross sector alliance against eviction and economic land concession. Groups from Vietnam, Hoa Binh Farmer Union (HBFU) and ArecA have been working on plantation workers organizing and investigation on land issues in Vietnam. This year, we also had participants representing groups in Yangon (Burma) and Maesot.



**The meeting was attended by 40 participants from 16 groups in Southeast Asia Sub Region**



Overview of country based issues/initiatives briefly shared during the introduction session

During the introduction, the participants briefly explained the issue that they were working on. The union in Laos currently is working on plantation/sugarcane plantation issues. The major problem is the land use-land concession given to plantation and also the owner of the factory. The union is pursuing the negotiation with the factory and plantation owners regarding the land use issue. The union also works on collective bargaining and members' recruitment in the private sectors.

In Philippine, ALEO representing state-owned electricity company has been fighting against privatization. The group has developed alternative strategy. Meanwhile, the state-owned electricity workers union (SP-PLN) from Indonesia has been organizing the workers against privatization policy. The group also argued that it was important to build awareness in the society about affordable or even free public services.

The group in Vietnam also shared the farmer-plantation conflict in the provinces. The land grabbing in Vietnam was rampant due to the establishment of infrastructure project and special economic zones. Meanwhile in Cambodia, the groups in urban and rural area have formed cross sector alliance, People Action for Change (PAC). The cross sector alliance, which is still a loose alliance focuses on many issues such as land issues and human rights. Another group from Cambodia, Cambodia Labour Confederation (CLC) organizes workers from various industries in Cambodia.

Regarding palm oil plantation issues, groups from Thailand, Indonesia and Philippine have taken up several initiatives such as setting up an alliance between landless peasants and plantation workers, occupying the plantation and community organizing to support the struggle of palm oil plantation workers.

***Introduction and Expectation***

In this session, the participants introduced themselves and provided brief information on their current work as well as their expectations from the meeting.



# Learning points: Sustainable organization, cross sector alliance and strategy

## Sustainable Organization and cross sector alliance

- Understanding sustainable organization
- Lessons learnt to be applied for local organizing
- Developing a good leadership
- Gender issues in developing the organization
- Sustainable organizations at local, national and regional
- Successful cases of sustainable organization
- Roles of insider and outsider and different power relations and its impact on organization
- Process of organizing the peasants in occupying the land
- Labour mobility and its consequences for organizing
- How to maintain cross sector alliances
- Resolving the conflict between different groups of workers.
- How to address rural urban divide among the workers?
- How to address the problems and difficulties in sustaining the alliance
- Connecting labor to land issues
- Land issues due to plantations and its impact on communities

## Strategies at national and regional level

- Organizing strategy at local and regional level
- Experiences from other countries in fighting against land grabbing
- Common challenges in the region
- Identify concrete ways to link the common initiatives on agriculture sector in the region (palm/ sugarcane etc)
- Learning from other countries on struggle against privatization
- How to deal with State repression
- Place of informal workers in global economy and its understating in organizing.
- Intersection between formal and informal economy.
- Tactics and strategy used by informal workers to deal with exploitation.
- How to identify bargaining target and strategies
- Cross border campaigns
- Is formalizing the informal workers the goal or something else?
- How to develop better policies and legislations.
- Current problems in SE Asia
- Regional strategy
- Common campaigns on land issues and other issues that impact workers across borders.



## ***Sustainable Organization and Cross Sector Alliance***

Participants were divided into thematic group discussions. The theme of group discussion was “Sustaining Organization and Cross Sector Alliance. The discussion covered leadership issues, conflict resolution, building up common agenda and managing alliance consisting of diverse groups.

### **Sustaining Organization**

Mobility of workers has been a major challenge of sustaining the organization. It is important to recognize “workers self organization (not yet structured organization)” in a place of situation where workers formal organization is absent. Furthermore, this is related to the visibility of informal workers organization. Whenever the organization takes up an action or voices their rights, they have to be ready for facing the strike back either from the state or capital agents.

In terms of policies and regulations, which have impacts on informal workers, we need to build an analysis by placing any individual workers’ case in the political context. This is important to break the isolation of informal workers in facing cases. In some cases, we agree not to name or register the informal workers organization as union. This is a tactic to avoid suppression.

### **Sustaining Cross Sector Alliance**

In looking into the cross sector alliance, we find that there are two main common bases; one is common agenda on the issue of poor, and on the strategy. Any gains achieved through short term struggle should serve as means to consolidate the members to fight for the long term goal. We also identify challenges such as limited resources and logistic.

Another challenge of cross sector alliance is diversity of the groups. They have their own historical background and organizing culture. Thus, it is important to discuss this matter thoroughly within the alliance. We need to develop a mechanism to solve the internal dynamic so the alliance can work on the common agendas peacefully. Indeed, we often encounter a situation where a group joins an alliance for its short term interest. However, there should be a mutual respect among members of alliance.

Another concern is the role of external supporting group which undermines the internal power of the alliance and creates dependency. The role of secretariat is important. Each alliance member needs to be aware of the issues experienced by all members. This awareness accelerates process of building internal solidarity. The workers, for instance, need to be aware of the issues experienced by farmers. Thus, we identify the need to map out the issues of various sectors and how they are interlinked.



## Elements of Sustainable Organization and Alliance

- Independence of the organization
- Consolidating member
- Awareness of the members that all issues are interconnected. This is in the context of sustaining a cross sector alliance
- Understanding that each sectors has different background, history and ways/culture of organizing
- Solidarity among members
- Layered leadership
- Short term and long term agenda and/or common agenda
- Management to bridge different interest and to encourage collective culture
- Equal relation—not patronizing
- Building support network
- Community support plays a prominent role (case of plantation strike in Philippine)
- The need of creating a space to link up the movement in rural and urban

### Challenges

- Labour mobility—decreasing membership
- Visibility—exposed to violence threat or strike back from the State agents and capital agents
- Visibility---how to make people to be capable of making themselves as agent of change
- Internal conflict or dynamic
- Migrant workers leader is under constant threat of deportation
- Each sector focuses too much on their issues
- Once the group is visible then there is a need to anticipate strike back

### What we can do together

- Identify concrete ways to link the common initiatives on agriculture sector in the region (palm/ sugarcane etc)
  - Learning from other countries on privatisation
  - Cross border campaigns
  - Exchange ideas and strategies
  - Information sharing and exchange
  - Online map
- <http://goo.gl/maps/yCVy>



### **Linking up struggle in urban and rural area: Experience of Indonesia and Thailand**



The session was followed by an open discussion on national level strategy. It provided a background for the participants to have a group discussion on regional initiatives and action plan

### **Sastro –Indonesia People Movement Confederation(KPRI)**

Just like we discussed yesterday, every country has a history of socio-movement. When it comes to Indonesia, the history of social movement, from 1966-1998, Indonesia was under the autocratic regime, so it was the period of uprising, Indonesia was under the pressure of the regime. In 1998, the autocratic regime was toppled down, and then everyone was thinking the political reform would resolve everything. Nevertheless, what so called reform was hijacked by neoliberal agendas. There was still no freedom of organization, freedom of association, and also the extraction of natural resources by multinational companies still remains.

After the political reform, we applied many experiments in consolidating workers at the local and also at the national levels. After 1998, there were many alliances of workers union at the industrialized zone. The agenda was the minimum wage of the workers. Even though, they were from different groups, but they could be united to fight for the same issues. The wage issue was escalated into political issues which also cover other sectors such as peasants and fishermen.

The workers alliance at local level was then consolidated into the national level. At the national alliance the issues were about the regulation and the wage. The alliances drafted the labor law, which also supported by some academics and NGOs. At first the alliance only focused on labour law and wage, but later they started to work more on the political issues and educational system, and the privatization.

The “democracy/political reform euphoria” encouraged the emergence of various alliances in Indonesia. Many alliances were collapsed later on and disoriented in envisioning their long term goals. Then the movement activists decided to organize and they try to bring in other groups to work together. There are many alliances and coalition committees, but they could not achieve their goals. So they had the reflection and discussion, and got together to find the cause of why they could not achieve their goals. Based on the reflection, they came up with three key ideas; the first one is they need to consolidate the alliance of various sectors. The second one was the need to consolidate the organization, and then the third one was the need to make the political consolidation.

From the consolidating ideas they came up with the platform to consolidate the peasants, workers and also the other activists. They came up with three main ideas; land reform, national industrialization policy, and ecological justice. In terms of consolidating, they had reflection on the best form of alliance that could play a prominent role. In term of political consolidation, they started mapping out possible and achievable targets. From the consolidating ideas, they came out of the strategy idea of alternatives; alternative political system, alternative consumptions and distribution, and alternative on collective management. They just finished a research which was not an academic research to strengthen their arguments on cross sectoral issues. They exercised alternative production system on the plantation land which was reclaimed by the peasants.

They collectively managed the land they reclaimed. The confederation has members in 33 provinces and 100 districts in Indonesia. In the district, the confederation set up “social movement (activist /organizers circle)”. The circle plays a prominent role in collective bargaining with the local authority.

Pongtip (Thailand)-Landless movement in rural and urban area

The sharing focuses on the experience of social movement in Thailand, specifically on the land reform issue. The social movement in Thailand is just like a curve, they rise, stay, and gone. The similar case must take place in other countries. Thirty years ago, we start working on the farmer issue, because the land issue is always important. Fifteen years ago, we have the farmer movement from different networks, and sometimes they encountered differences regarding land and the forest issue. Another issue encountered was how to sustain the organization and make it independent.

Seven or eight years ago, we sent the people to Brazil for field exposure by having exchange with MST (Landless People Movement). The network of peasant movement in Thailand had discussion to identify the common issues. There are two main agendas of the network; solving the problem of members and in parallel manner strengthening the network. We also need to find a mechanism to create a sense of belonging that the members of network do not solely focus on their individual group interests.

There are four to five points on the way we work. First, we try to make the members and the leaders and the movements visible in society. We figured out strategy to make people recognize the movement. We need to make society look into land issue as an important issue. We have the process of legal land titling, and most of the land people occupied is the illegal land. The land that people occupy in the cities belongs to the state railway. People also occupy the land along the canals that belongs to the state water supply. The owners of the land try to evict these people but since the local movement is so strong, the people survive.

We need to build awareness in the society about who the landless people are. In the city, these landless are construction workers, waste pickers and street vendors whose work is maintaining the city and providing cheap services for society. Society also needs to understand the background of the landless movement in rural area. They has to support the landless movement. The third thing the network also needs to propose alternative to the society and state. The rich always think that the farmers sold their land and became landless. In Thailand, we have two types of land title, the first one is state land title, the land that belong to ministry of forestry, state railway, and state water supply, and etc. And the second one is the private land title.

We propose to the society that we need the collective land title; we also propose the academic people to support our cause. The collective land title, in one community, consists of 70 households. In the regulation of collective land title, everyone can produce and sell products, but they cannot sell their land. There are many cases that the people try to violate the law by selling the land. So the committees will try to talk and negotiate with them. But it's not the law yet, it's just the decree. We also propose the land tax, we try to work with the university people and the academics. We also propose the land bank. We propose the concept of the land bank to the previous government.

Here in the movement, the main strategy they used is mass pressure. In every movement, we gather the people to have demonstration in front of the government house. They did the advocacy document to explain more on who they are, and why they had to make the demonstration. We also had a negotiation with the people at the governmental level, the minister of interior, the minister of forestry, and the stakeholders

And another main thing is we work very much with the alliance especially with the independent organizations. The movement also sits in the different committees, for example the lawyer council. We also work with the committee on land reform, because we want to upgrade the land title to be the law also. We work with the administrative court, and to do the legal titling, and sometimes we sue the department of national park. Because they sued people and charge those people, since those people cut the trees down. We called this one global warming case.

We also work with the office of persecutor, these alliances also very much support the movement. And we work the TPBS, Thai Public Broadcasting Station. This station has a goal to serve and develop the society. To make the society understands the cause of the landless. We need to have regulation in the movement, which is the most difficult thing, because within the network, we have different background, different work areas, and etc. But if they come together and find the common issue, they need to set the standard rules.

We also build up the alliances around to support the palm oil plantation occupation, national park occupation and railway land occupation. Some of them have been harassed and threatened and some of them were shot down during the demonstration. So we work as alliances, the alliance plays a role as protecting guard. The alliance campaigns the cause to the society and expands the network of support. We have an ad hoc committee where, groups from various issues such as environmental and power plant issues identify land issue as a common issue.



## Regional Initiatives and Action

### Campaign

Issues	Action Plan	Time and Place	Contribution and role division
Land grabbing and land concession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking up the campaign in People Assembly during the ASEAN Summit</li> <li>• Joint solidarity action and statement</li> </ul>	November in Cambodia	The Cambodian groups will update us further

### Research

Issues	Action Plan	Time and Place	Contribution and role division
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plantation</li> <li>• Land grabbing and occupation in rural and urban</li> <li>• Contract farming</li> <li>• Privatization</li> <li>• Descent and sustainable livelihood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compiling the available research material</li> <li>• Linking up with progressive academics</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available research material on plantation issues: LAL (Thailand), SBPI (Indonesia) and CTUHR (Philippine)</li> <li>• Linking with the group with academics (CATSEA)</li> <li>• Geoff Mynt volunteers to help compile the available research material</li> <li>• For privatization, Indonesia group (SP-PLN-KSN) with ALEO (Philippine), NSTP will start exchanging information related to organizing</li> </ul>

## Communication and platform sharing

Issues	Strategy	Contribution/Role division
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustaining sharing process at regional level</li> <li>• Exploring collaboration on mining issues</li> <li>• Mapping proposal on alternative production and share it among the groups</li> </ul>	Using the google map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wulan will invite the group to the mailing list</li> <li>• Share a simple blogsite where people can upload information and put the brief summary to the google map</li> <li>• The groups will also share their local website link so that people at national level can access information in their language</li> </ul>

## Training and capacity building

Issues	Strategy	Contribution/Role division
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training on portraying informalization and land issues</li> <li>• Training on cross sector alliance</li> <li>• Training on pursuing alternative production system</li> </ul>	Expanding or structuring the available research material into modul	All groups can share their material and have further discussion