

## Deck Stacked Against Women’s Land Rights In Asia

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**WASHINGTON, Jul 24 2012 (IPS) - Women across Asia are being shut out from prosperous forestland because of a paradigm geared towards male ownership, according to a new [report](#) by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), an environmental non-governmental organisation.**

By [Ethan Freedman](#)

“Women continue to be excluded from property rights and they are seldom the owners of the land they cultivate,” the RRI study says. “Gender discrimination combined with the lack of rights and security and limited opportunities often lock women into a cycle of vulnerability and poverty.”

Xiaobei Wang, a field researcher for RRI, highlights how women are effectively prevented from enjoying the profits received from forestland.

“A woman's membership of a collective or a household will change with her marital status. This crucial issue has direct bearing on whether women can enjoy the same rights and benefits as men,” she explained.

“Whether women marry in or marry out, they seem to face vulnerability, which worsens when they divorce.”

In Nepal, one example given in the report, women own just 10 percent of the landholdings, and the average land holding for a woman is two-thirds of what the average male owner owns.

Although there is no uniform model for land ownership in these rural areas, typically men are the ones that get the say over the distribution and allocation, according to the RRI report.

An International Forestry Review [study](#) of forestland in China states that access to forestland provides economic opportunity to impoverished rural communities.

The Hongtian village in Mainland China, one of the villages mentioned in the study, was able to maintain a prosperous community by collecting 100,000 Yuan per year in rent fees from contractors. They were then able to use that money to reinvest in infrastructure, such as roads and access to electricity, which led to further modernisation and economic opportunity.

Many groups are decrying the lack of progress among Asian women, saying that is it holding some countries back from prosperity.

“In every country across Asia and the Pacific, pervasive gender inequality remains a barrier to progress, justice and social stability, and deprives the region of a significant source of human potential,” the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) wrote in their annual Human Development Report.

A 2011 estimate by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) placed the total cost of gender job inequality in Asia at 47 billion dollars a year, due to the economic inactivity of 45

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percent of working-age women in Asia — as compared to 19 percent of working-age Asian men.

Some say that there are other factors holding women back from achieving affluence, beyond economic interests.

“It’s not economic development that brings about a narrowing of the gap. It’s obviously cultural values,” Aung San Suu Kyi, chair of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and member of the Burmese parliament, said at the World Economic Forum.

“And I think these are what (women) have to address if we want to find out why we are not allowed to make the contributions of which we are capable,” she continued.

One of the most successful East Asian countries, China, has faced scrutiny over the lack of women in the corporate landscape. It has been one of the Asian countries shifting away from an agrarian society, with nearly half of its 1.37 billion citizens now living in urban areas, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, the Chinese census agency.

A [report](#) by the World Bank, released earlier this year, found that, in the private sector, there had been some progress in women corporate leadership in East Asia. In a study of Hong Kong businesses, they said, the percentage of women on corporate boards increased from less than five percent to 8.9 percent during the 2000-2009 decade.

The report also notes that East Asia has a high percentage of firms owned by women and firms with female top management, compared to other developing regions. Countries like Mongolia, the Philippines and Vietnam have what they consider the “highest levels of female participation in business ownership” —with a number hovering above 20 percent.

According to the 2011 U.N. Millennium Development Goals Report, women accounted for 42 percent of non-agricultural employment in 2009, a number that is projected to rise one percent by 2015.

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