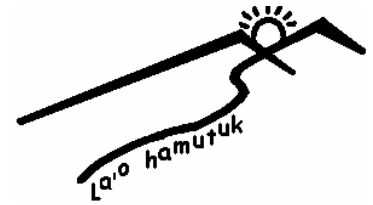


La'o Hamutuk

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Timor-Leste-Philippines Exchange on Agrarian Reform Narrative report

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Introduction

La'o Hamutuk, the Timor-Leste Institute for Reconstruction Monitoring and Analysis, is a five-year-old Timor-Leste NGO which monitors and analyzes international institutions in Timor Leste. In addition, the organization helps to improve knowledge in Timor-Leste about alternative development models. One method to accomplish this is an *intercambio* (exchange) between Timor-Leste civil society and civil society in other countries, to strengthen international solidarity links and explore grassroots initiatives. *La'o Hamutuk's* past *intercambios* have involved Brazil (popular education), Nicaragua (power and gender), Cuba (health and agriculture) and Nigeria (dangers of petroleum development).

In November and December 2004, *La'o Hamutuk* organized an *intercambio* with the Philippines focusing on agrarian reform, in cooperation with fifteen other Timor-Leste civil society groups. We were hosted by the Philippines-based Initiatives for International Dialog (IID) and Partnership Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Service (PARRDS).

La'o Hamutuk sent eight Timor Leste activists to the Philippines for a month of learning and exchanging information with Filipino activists and farmers. The Timorese participating were Joãozito Viana from *La'o Hamutuk*, Mateus Tilman from Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (KSI), João Alves Trindade from Erpoleks Lequisi- Ermera, Amaro Silverio dos Santos from



Klibur Joventude Haburas Rai (KJHR) Sacoco-Ermera, Rosito da Silva Belo from HAK Association-Baucau, Natalia de Jesus Cesaltino from Forum Komunikasi Perempuan Timor Lorosa'e (Fokupers), Ernesto Gusmão from Kalo-heda Institute

of Technology, Agriculture and Economy (ITAEEK) Uatolari Viqueque, and Juvenção Magno from the Iliomar Farmers Cooperative-Lospalos.

Before departing, participants conducted field research in Liquisi and Sakoko, Timor-Leste, to see what issues were of most concern to local farmers. After returning, they held workshops with community leaders and farmers to share the lessons of their experiences.

Frontier Internship Mission (Switzerland) granted US\$30,000 to *La'o Hamutuk* to cover the expenses of this project.

Agrarian conditions in Timor Leste

Timor Leste went under three periods of colonialism, with the Portuguese extending over 450 years, Japanese more than three years and Indonesian for 24 years. These periods of colonialism created huge problems for farmers. The Portuguese and Indonesian periods had particular impact on cultivation, traditional local leadership (Liurai) and the Church. Agriculturally productive land was given to or taken by the colonial government and the church in several areas.

One negative consequence of colonialism was the capitalization of land, turning farmers into farm laborers on plantations. In addition, many small land holding farmers near the plantation sites lost or sold their land to the larger industry.

After independence in 2002, the Timor-Leste government passed Law 1/2003 regarding real estate, which assigns former colonial assets to the government. Agrarian justice is a basic issue for farmer's economic life and is highlighted in Article 54.4 of the Timor-Leste Constitution, but land issues continue to create conflict in some areas of Timor Leste.

The weak agrarian structure left several farmers landless, as more productive lands (such as in Ermera, Same, Aileu and Ainaro) became coffee plantations to service European markets. In addition, urban expansion (Bairopite, Comoro and some districts) and the expansion of Church missions (Lospalos, Viqueque and Dili) also took land away from small farmers.

The concentration of land ownership into fewer hands already has provoked some workers' movements. For example, in the 1980s Ermera plantation workers destroyed fences and coffee plants and attacked plantation guards. In 2000 they began occupying the coffee plantation and dividing the land amongst themselves.

Agrarian Reform in the Philippines

Like Timor Leste, the Philippines has survived centuries of colonialism. The Philippines was subjected to Spanish and U.S. colonialism. Both the Philippines and Timor-Leste have had capitalist development of land, forcing farmers into poverty and to become laborers on land they do not own. Capital was concentrated in the hands of businessmen and wealthy proprietors. According to Father Anoran (a Pastor and the Executive Director of NC-PERD in Negros

Occidental), agrarian reform has been implemented for 16 years, but the land is still concentrated in the hands of a few rich Filipinos, and 80% of the people live in poverty without farmland.

After many years of struggle against the Marcos dictatorship, the 1986 People's Power revolution united farmers, workers, churches, academics, students and political leaders who had split with Marcos. This movement also launched the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform. President Marcos was overthrown and Corazon Aquino came to power.

Two years later, President Aquino issued a law on agrarian reform (ARL/RA 6657) and then implemented the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The program was originally planned to last only ten years. However, since it did not reach its targets, it was extended for another ten years (until 2008).

In the Philippines, agrarian reform has aimed at transferring land from landlords to farmers. CARP policies include compulsory acquisition, with the government directly transferring land from landlords to the farmers; voluntary land transfer, with the landlords volunteering land to the government or to the farmers; and stock distribution option/sharing production profit, with the landlord and farmers agreeing to divide the profits from the land.

Activities in the Philippines

The *intercambio* visited three islands of the Philippines: Luzon (Tarlac, Pampanga, and Zambales Districts), Visayas (Negros Occidental) and Mindanao (Cotabato and Bukidnon).

Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) Timor Leste Field Officer Ruby Lora and Philippines Program Officer for PARRDS (Partnership Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Service) Alejandro P. Soto, who served as the *intercambio* program coordinator in the Philippines, accompanied the participants. Their substantial knowledge and experience with agrarian reform in the Philippines proved invaluable for the Timorese participants. These two people also coordinated meetings with civil society organizations.



Among the groups the Timorese delegation met with were: UNURKA, Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community (PEACE) Foundation, Project Development Institute (PDI), Partnership Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services (PARRDS), Initiatives for International Dialog (IID), Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), Alternative

Community-Centered Organization for Rural Development (ACCORD), Philippine Human Rights Information Center (Philrights), Philippine Alliance of Human

Rights Advocates (PAHRA), tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan (KAISAHAN-an organization working to end institutional discrimination against farmers), NC-PERD and the Farmers Association of Davao City (FADC).

These organizations work on many issues involved with CARP including labor, production services, capacity building, justice, democracy and human rights.

Intercambio participants also met with members of the Philippines congress and officials of the government's Agrarian Reform department, as well as with local farmers organizations.

Findings

Based on our meetings and experiences, *La'o Hamutuk* has learned some important aspects to agrarian reform, including:

A movement encompassing farmers, workers, fisher people and indigenous people is the base of agrarian reform in the Philippines. The participants heard, saw and discussed with civil society organizations about organizational models, mobilizing alliances and capacity building for farmers leaders.

Filipino leaders changed the political scene with the approval of the Agrarian Reform Law.

Civil society organizations have a role in implementing the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) as a follow-up to the implementation of the government's Agrarian Reform Law.

Civil society movements have had to realign themselves in response to political policies. CARP implementation has being going on long enough for the movement to be more familiar with farmers and how to respond to their needs. Examples can be seen of several individuals and political groups abandoning political violence and joining social-democratic groups.

The gender roles of people organizers and community organizers have changed as the result of land being transferred to the farmers. The participants saw changes in the gender movement as a strategy of bringing a feminist approach into the farmers' and labor struggles.

Multi-national cooperation/international agencies have assumed a prominent role in the CARP program. They are changing the agricultural structure to a capitalist production model, including the promotion of "monocarps" (sugar cane, mango, banana, coffee and others) aimed towards a global market. The farmers are not moving towards self-production but becoming the farm laborers of international companies expanding throughout the Third World.

Indigenous peoples continue to try to maintain their culture. Indigenous peoples in the Philippines are defined as those who continue to struggle to maintain local structures and culture. The Indigenous People Republic Act (IPRA) of 1994 increased the protection of indigenous rights.

These are complex issues and will require further study for a comprehensive understanding. This *Intercambio* is only the first step for the participants to familiarize themselves with agrarian reform and apply their knowledge to Timor Leste in the future.

Evaluation and plan of action

Strategies to achieve agrarian reform in Timor Leste must be based in the values of the Timorese people. The needs and capabilities of the people and grassroots organizations should guide current and future action.

The participants will take their experiences from the *Intercambio* and adapt them to their own realities. We have much to learn from the organizing done by farmers, workers, fisher folk and indigenous people during and after the Marcos dictatorship. The peaceful struggle continues in the Philippines. In the words of Loida, an activist farmer and peoples organizer with the Project Development Institute (PDI), "we will continue to struggle for the future of our grandchildren. We are ready to return to the streets, and not to beg for money and food. Revolution is still our ultimate goal, the poor still dream of democracy and justice." After sixteen years of implementing the Agrarian Reform Law, many of her fellow farmers still have no land.

After returning to Timor-Leste just before Christmas, *La'o Hamutuk* and the other *intercambio* participants planned several follow-up activities. One workshop was held in February, and other conferences in agricultural areas, as well as popular education, are planned. Although *La'o Hamutuk* will continue to be involved, we expect that KSI and Fokupers, two NGOs which participated in the *intercambio*, will take the lead.