

LOCALIZING DIGITAL LAND ADMINISTRATION IN CUSTOMARY TENURE REGIMES TO SECURE INDIVIDUAL TENURE

INTERVENTION BY RNBA IN THE HILLS OF MANIPUR



Context

- Land tenure in North East India is governed under customary laws with adequate autonomy and protection under the Indian Constitution.
- Most land in the hill areas remains un-surveyed and lacks land records. Moreover land relations remain patriarchal, with poor recognition of women's land rights.
- Land conflicts within communities and as a result of development interventions are intensifying in the absence of documented land rights; land use changes from traditional shifting cultivation to long-term uses, like horticulture and paddy terraces, also call for tenure security and documentation to incentivize investments and access to the entitlements.

Interventions

The Rongmei Naga Baptist Association (RNBA), an NGO network, with support from NR Management Consultants -Centre for Land Governance (NRMCC-CLG) piloted a community mapping exercise in the Manipur Hills. The project trained local youth to use a mobile phone linked to a differential global positioning system (DGPS) to map and document long-term land use rights with concurrence from local communities resulting in legitimate village institutions issuing Land Tenure Certificates with joint title (including women's names), spatial details, and documentation of customary norms. The process involved local and customary institutions and was shared with state-level actors, including members of autonomous district councils (ADC), clan leaders, and Government officials.

Lessons

- Documented and transparent evidence of land rights can reduce conflicts in customary tenure landscapes.
- A fit for purpose land administration solution can help village councils to develop their own digital land administration system quickly document land tenure in the un-surveyed hill regions.
- Scaling up and sustaining mapping and land rights documentation across the Manipur Hill districts, however, requires political participation of higher tribal institutions, such as the ADC and Hill Area Committee (HAC), as well as champions within the State administration.



Image Credit: Navin Amang

Introduction

Northeast India¹ exemplifies unique customary land governance regimes that differ from the rest of India. To preserve the tradition of self-governance of the tribal communities, the Sixth (VI) Schedule² was incorporated into the Constitution of India. Along with Schedule VI, special constitutional provisions viz. Article 371 A, C, G and H, grant considerable autonomy to the tribal communities of the region. No act of Parliament shall affect the customary law or procedures governing the ownership and transfer of land in these States without the decision of the State Assembly with a resolution. Schedule VI also provides for the establishment of autonomous district councils (ADCs)³ to protect the rights of tribal populations.

The hills and plains in Northeast India are characterized by different laws governing property rights. As in most other parts of the country, in the plains of the Northeast, individual rights over land holdings are transferable, and buying and selling of such rights are generally not restricted. However, in the hill areas, inhabited mostly by tribal populations, individual rights over land and land transfers are subject to restrictions. In the hill areas, there are also two different tenure systems: (a) community ownership of land in areas where shifting cultivation is still practiced, where households enjoy user rights to land allocated to them by a traditional authority and (b) individual ownership of land, which is transferable only within members of the local tribal community.

Land issues in the hills⁴ of Manipur, inhabited by indigenous communities, are characterized by a lack of cadastral surveying, mapping, and land records; gender and equity concerns in customary tenure systems; an increasing trend of large-scale transfer of community land to the wealthy and outsiders by the Chiefs in many areas; and the high cost of dispute resolution in the absence of formal land records, particularly for inter-community and inter-village land conflicts. With modernisation and development interventions increasingly reaching across the region, a process of land privatization has begun in the hill areas. This trend is changing customary land relations, with instances of land being appropriated by Chiefs and powerful members of the clans.

¹The north eastern region constitutes about 8 percent of India's size with approximately 40 million of the total population of India (Census 2011). This region has a significant tribal population. During the British era, Tribal areas were classified as "excluded" and "Partially Excluded" under the Government of India Act 1935.

²The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 (2) of the Constitution relates to those areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram which are declared as "tribal areas" and provides for District or Regional Autonomous Councils (ADC) for such areas with having wide ranging legislative, judicial and executive powers around all types of land except for reserve forests. These councils are given power to make law, inter alia, for (a) the allotment, occupation or use, or the setting apart, of land, other than reserve forest, for agriculture or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural or any other purpose likely to promote the interests of the inhabitants of any village or town only except the compulsory acquisition of any land for public purposes by the Government of the State; (b) the management of any forest not being a reserved forest; (c) the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation; (d) the inheritance of property."

³The Sixth Schedule makes provision that schedule 6 tribal areas will be autonomous districts and be governed by Autonomous District Councils. The District Council and the Regional Council under the Sixth Schedule have power to make laws, possibility on the various legislative subjects.

⁴Practices of community ownership of land and forests have historically evolved in interaction with local systems of hill village settlements, land uses and livelihoods. Local traditional customary and community tenures vary across the villages and tribes, while also differing the way they recognize gender relations, interact with other communities and clans; interface with land uses and requirements/demands of development related formalities.

At the same time, the patriarchal customary governance structures in many communities continue to discriminate against women's land ownership and participation in land governance. The customary system of land governance in these areas—which is based on un-codified customary norms, traditional/ocular measurements, verbal/local rights recognition, and village-based dispute resolution—is struggling to cope with the increasing aspirations, livelihoods needs, and disputes fuelled by economic development. The lack of land records has also been identified as a barrier to the extension of institutional credit in the hill economies of the region and, therefore, the region's economic development. The non-transferability of holding rights renders customary land unsuitable as collateral for the purpose of securing institutional credit to land holders (Agarwal, 1987).

The Rongmei Naga Baptist Association (RNBA)⁵ consists of 6 NGO partners working in 6 districts of Manipur.

The network's engagement in Natural Resources Management (NRM) and natural resource-based livelihoods activities in the context of changing customary tenure regimes led to its realization of the importance of supporting customary land rights and land governance. In 2011, the RNBA network started working directly on land issues⁶. Since then, the RNBA has been engaging with local communities, village authorities/chiefs, clan and church leaders, other civil society organizations, and government authorities to improve the land tenure security of indigenous poor households, particularly in the Manipur hills, with a focus on strengthening women's land rights, while also piloting the use of modern mapping technology to develop village registries of household land tenure certificates.

Only 10 percent of the state's geographical area has been covered by a cadastral survey, mostly in the plains and some parts of the hills. The hill districts remain

characterized mostly by un-surveyed land and hence any kind of land record or documents or maps, as it was resisted by the tribal leaders due to their perception that this would threaten customary land tenure in the hill areas. There is a popular perception that formal land laws and surveys will not only erode the traditional polity but also marginalise tribal peoples and alienate them from their ownership and possession of the land⁷ (Kipgen, 2018). As such, all the tribal groups follow their own customary, traditional land use and management systems in the hills, and implementation of the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act (MLR&LR), 1960 is largely limited to the valleys. As these hill areas remain underdeveloped compared to the valley lands, one of the prevailing development assumptions is that the lack of documentation of land rights in the hill areas has limited economic development in these areas.



Image Credit: Rural Aid Services (RAS)

⁵The RNBA (<https://www.rnba.in>) is a church-based organization. Development & Relief Department is the social wing of Rongmei Naga Baptist Association (RNBA) working with partners NGOs in capacity building, fund raising and mainstreaming development in North Eastern states of India. RNBA is working with 6 partner NGOs on thematic issues like sustainable natural resources management and livelihood, Food Security, Women Empowerment, Engagement with Youth, Renewable Energy and education. In this document, "RNBA" denotes the partnership which includes 6 partner NGOs, working together to further community based natural resources management and livelihoods, with support of Bread for the World, Germany (<https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/en/bread-for-the-world/>)

⁶In 2011, RNBA started working directly on land issues through engagement with local communities, village authorities/chiefs, clan and church leaders, civil society and government authorities to improve the land tenure security of indigenous poor households. The activities earlier included (1) Village level mapping of land use, land rights: Village level land use and land right maps have been prepared through participatory mapping process with the use of GPS and GIS technology (2) Documentation of trends in land transfer in project villages (3) Consultation with Clan leaders and Village Authorities on Land rights and (4) Networking with other NGO and civil society at large around land rights in Manipur

The distinct land use and management systems and diverse enforcement mechanisms, as well as the lack of codification of rules and norms, is considered by many social scientists as the main reasons of conflict among different ethnic communities (Kipgen, 2013). Land related conflicts have been increasing over the last decade, mostly related to boundaries between villages or individuals. In the absence of land records, most of these conflicts remain unresolved despite significant investments of time and money in different customary, political, and formal judicial dispute resolution platforms, including Civil Courts, Under Ground Courts⁸, and Apex Clan courts. Land conflicts are estimated to affect at least one-third of hill villages (pers comm)⁹. With development projects increasing in the hill areas, contestation over compensation claims due to land acquisition are also leading to increasing conflicts between chief/ clan leaders and villagers. In the absence of the land records, compensation is usually paid to the chief on behalf of the community and not to individuals, and these funds are not always shared equitably (Bezbaruah, 2017).

Although customary laws and land tenure practices vary widely across ethnic groups and even from village to village in the Manipur Hills, there are entrenched gender inequities in many customary laws related to land. This is particularly relevant to inheritance, where the first or last sons are typically favoured, and daughters are discriminated against (Kadeikeimi, 2017). For example, Naga society is patrilineal, with absolute male ascendancy (Hudson, 2007). As per Naga and Kuki customary laws, prevalent in the Manipur hills, women do not have rights to own or inherit land (Chowdhry, 2009). Customary laws governing land tenure are mostly silent on women's land rights (WLR) in general.



Image Credit: Navin Amang

However, women's roles in social and political affairs are regulated by patriarchal traditional customs and norms that make women peripheral in the political power¹⁰ structure of the society viz. Village Council¹¹ that governs customary land rights (Panmei, 2015). Women's roles and land rights within families also fall within the patriarchal, patrilineal system.

Over the last decade, the dependency on *jhum* (shifting cultivation), which had been the local traditional land use and food production system, has been declining. While the land under *jhum* has declined, the land area under horticulture, terraced land, and infrastructure projects¹² has increased

(Punitha et al. 2013). The total area under *jhum* reduced from 85,220 ha in 2005-06 to 47,163 ha in 2008-09 (GoM 2015). The agricultural land use doubled in area, and the built-up area registered a five-fold increase during the period 1989-2016 in the state, while the built-up and agricultural land above 800 m altitude increased by 20 percent and 15 percent, respectively, during this period (Sharma, 2018). This change in land use has also impacted the local land tenure system. These new land uses require longer-term investments, as well as access to public services entitlements for inputs and subsidies, which has led to demand for formal documentation to record land rights.

⁷The Manipur Land Reform and Land Revenue Act, 1960 is extended to the whole valley but applies only to a negligible portion of the hill area. Over the years, the state government of Manipur has attempted to pass several land laws with certain amendments and the recent one being the New Land Use Policy, 2014. Each time the state government attempts to do so it reinstates ethnic polarisation and intensified conflicts within the state. The introduction of any legislation such as land tenure in the hill areas is seen with suspicion and considers being destructive to tribal land ownership system based on traditional customary laws.

⁸This is an extra-legal practice attributed to insurgent groups, who are also widely referred as under-ground groups. These groups are aligned as per ethnic identity and are often involved in arbitration.

⁹As shared by community leaders in a state level workshop organized by RNBA Monindra, Village Development Committee Secretary from the village Mutum Yangbi, Bishnupur District, Manipur.

¹⁰Women cannot be member or chief of the village council.

¹¹The Council plays a very important role as the highest authority in the village and life revolved round the decisions taken by the council. The Naga Village Councils carry out the administrative and judicial work, which includes regulation of land.

¹²Build-up area of Imphal city, capital of Manipur, had increased from 22.07 sq.km in 1970 to 74.16 sq.km in 2015 while agriculture areas shrank from 54.18 sq.km to 14.26 sq.km during this period.

Among villagers, demand for long-term land tenure over the same piece of land has increased, in contrast to the short-term and shifting land tenure characterized by shifting cultivation. There has thus been an increase in the area of individually held land and the landless population and a decline in community held lands (Maithani, 2005). These trends warrant increased security of tenure for individual land to meet the minimum developmental aspirations of the community without undermining the spirit of

customary tenure and the community/village role in land governance.

In response to this demand for increased individual tenure security, and in the absence of legal provision for formal land records in customary lands, there have been instances of village chiefs issuing handwritten or typed documents endorsing the ownership/possession of an individual or household over a piece of land, based on their request, for specific purposes viz. accessing entitlements.

These documents were usually descriptive texts and often lacked reference to the location, extent, and type of land, as well as the terms and conditions. Still, anecdotal evidence suggests that even simple textual land records issued by customary authorities can help farmers access government agricultural entitlements and compensation in the case of land acquisition (Box 1).

CASE STUDY: A Land Document enhances access to not only farm entitlements, but also to compensation

The limited applicability of the Manipur Land Reforms Act allows the customary regime to manage land issues at the community level. Nearly 15 years ago, the farmers of a Kuki village, Phaitol (one of the project villages of the RNBA Network), had approached the National Rubber Board for purchasing rubber saplings at a subsidized rate. The National Rubber Board asked the farmers to provide land possession/ownership certificates recommended by the village Chief to access the rubber saplings. In response to the farmers



Image Credit: Rural Aid Services (RAS)

approaching for the same, the village Chief had issued land recommendation certificates to all the 80 households, who then started rubber farming. This example demonstrates how a simple recommendation letter acted as proof of land rights, allowing the farmers to access entitlements from a government agriculture scheme.

When the railway construction started during the year 2013-2014 in the village, the construction and land acquisition damaged nine (9) rubber farms of nine households. Under the chieftan regime, compensation is usually allocated directly to the Chief, who in many instances does not share it with the villagers.

However, as the affected families in this case had recommendation certificates from the chief issued earlier for establishing their rubber plantations, they approached the railway authorities with their certificates, and the railway authorities delivered the compensation directly to all affected households. This shows how land documentation can help farmers benefit from better access to not only government schemes, but also compensation when their land is acquired.

Box 1 (Bezbaruah, 2017 and Personal Communication with RNBA partners)



Objective

In line with the changing economic context and increasing community aspirations towards individual tenure, there has also been a growing receptiveness of customary and religious authorities to consider provisioning some form of enhanced individual tenure security without

undermining the village customary institutions and basic tenets of local tenure regimes. There was also an emergent need to respond to the global trend towards gender equity and sustainable development. With an aim to respond these needs, and drawing upon its past engagements around

land governance, the RNBA partnered with the NRM¹³ Centre for Land Governance (CLG)¹⁴ in 2017 to pilot community-led land rights mapping.

Institutional Arrangement

The engagement around community-led mapping takes place at three levels. At the state level, there is a technology and knowledge partnership between the RNBA-Network and NRM-CLG, along with a geospatial information system (GIS) firm, Geolysis, which designed a hardware and software system for producing land tenure certificates that integrates local tenure realities and builds on a participatory information collection and validation process. The partners also created an interface with state-level actors, including government officials, NGO leaders, and ADC leaders, through consultations at the state level. At the partner NGO level¹⁵, team members and village-volunteers (a man and a woman) were trained in the community survey process and interfaced with district and block level officials, the ADC, and village authorities, informing them about the process and where possible involving them in the land certification process. At the village level, the village authority led the community mapping process, assisted by the trained NGO team members and village youth. There were also several rounds of village meetings for consensus building on the survey process and to build understanding to ensure free prior informed consent, as well as to improve women's land rights. The decision on the land to be surveyed was also agreed on at this level.

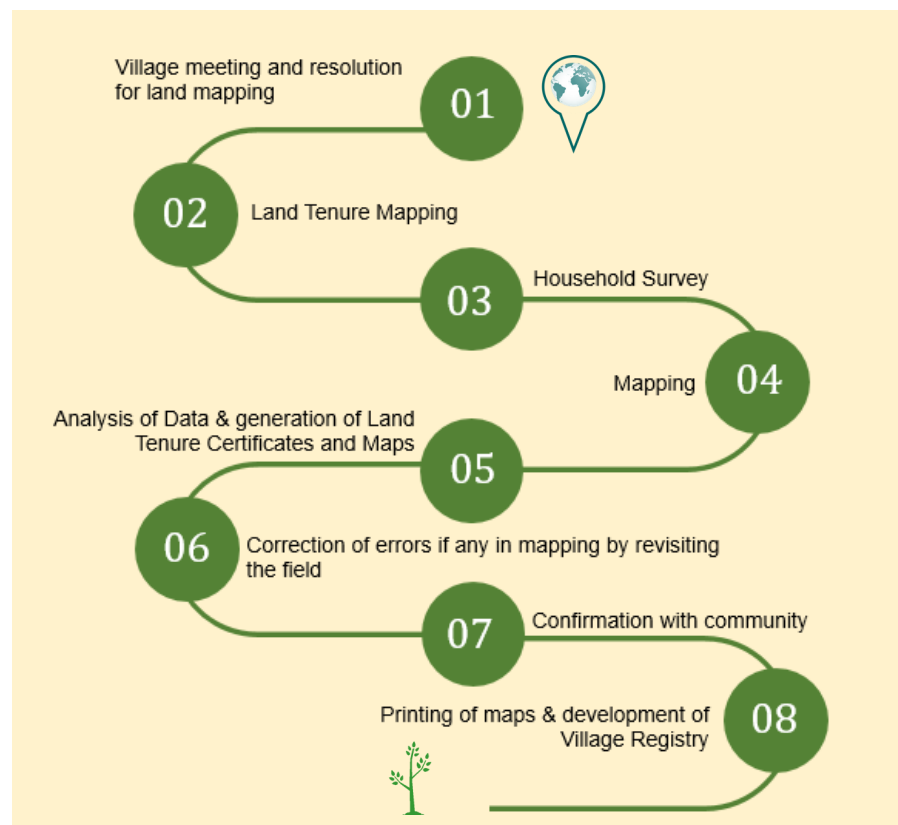


Figure 1. Community led mapping process followed in the Manipur Hills

¹³The NR Management Consultants India Private Limited (NRM) is a for-profit organization headquartered at New Delhi, India, working around a range of specialist areas like rural development, livelihoods, women empowerment, forestry, education, skill development, water and sanitation, financial inclusion and climate change, focussing on the poor and marginalised population. www.nrmc.co

¹⁴Center for Land Governance located at Bhubaneswar (India), is a unit within NRM, involved in research, advocacy, policy analysis and capacity building of stakeholders associated with land rights, urban and rural tenure governance, gender, forest rights, livelihoods, agriculture and sustainable development. www.centerforland.org

¹⁵One partner NGO works in 5-6 villages under this project; mapping was piloted in one such village with every partner.

Community-led mapping of village customary land tenure and documentation:

RNBA through its partners raised the land rights awareness of individuals without hindering the customary ethos of the communities. The process flow (Figure 1) was developed through participatory consultation as the steps to effectively map the local tenure situation.

A user-friendly mapping application developed by CLG-Geolysis was used to implement a participatory and comprehensive mapping process for the development of intermediate land records (Customary Land Tenure Certificates) in 5 hill villages¹⁶. This process mapped long-term land tenure, viz. land under permanent/long-term land use, including women's land rights, and the boundaries of the community lands and villages.

Village-level parcel mapping was carried out by the village youth with support of the

partner NGO. These youth received a two-day training and piloting exercise led by CLG-NRMC. Youth were trained on the set up and use of the mapping device (Android devices) and survey forms (Figure 2). While household and parcel information were collected using the free, open source Kobo Collect Application¹⁷ on smartphones and tablets, parcel mapping was completed using a Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS)¹⁸ device (antenna) attached to the smartphone as the rover with a fixed base station device mounted temporarily in the village during the survey.

Trained village youth could complete the mapping and surveying process in their target villages in a 3-month period considering the remoteness, seasonality of farming, and cultural activities and accessibility. Household participation in the mapping process was high, and, in most cases, women participated in the mapping process, including by showing the

boundaries to the youth volunteers (Figure 3).

The customary tenure regimes of indigenous communities in the state vary in the way they determine eligibility, duration, land use, inheritance, transfer, and other tenurial relations between the people and land, and these needed to be specifically reflected in the proposed land document to avoid privatization of land resources (while ensuring limited individualization) and keeping the principles of the customary tenure regime intact. This motivation led to wider consultations by the RNBA partners with community and clan leaders, government officials, and civil society organisations (CSOs) around the best way to document customary land tenure, leading to the development of community-specific Land Tenure Certificates (LTCs) to document customary tenure rights in a locally adapted way. Village authorities and households agreed to a village-level registry



Figure 2 Training of youth on DGPS mapping
Image Credit: Navin Amang

¹⁶The communities in the villages are from the ethnic groups viz. Kuki, Rongmei Naga, Mhar, Zeme Naga and Meitei.

¹⁷ KoBoToolbox is a free and open source suite of tools for field data collection.

¹⁸ A Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) is an enhancement to the Global Positioning System (GPS) which provides improved location accuracy, in the range of operations of each system, from the 15-meter nominal GPS accuracy to about 1-3 cm

system with provision of land tenure certificates (LTC) as evidence of individual land tenure to help landholders access credit and public services entitlements. The LTCs were accordingly designed based on the customary terms and conditions as identified by the communities and using a template to collect the required information, including gender of the landholders, names of both spouses (woman's name listed first), location of the parcel (identified using coordinates and satellite images), the information of neighbouring landowners, and extent of the area. LTC delivery was

prioritized for women landholders and for long-term land uses viz. fruit plantations, terraces, and agroforestry. Subsequent improvements in the LTC, as suggested by local stakeholders, include the addition of at least two witnesses along with the village chief and landholder to enhance its legitimacy; the development of a Household Code and Parcel Code system; the recording of the current land use and local names of the land sites/blocks; and the identification and geo-referencing of all parcels with reference to common geo-stations in the village.



Figure 3 Woman Land Owner mapping her land with trained youth
Image Credit: Navin Amang; RNBA



Scale (coverage) / Implementation status

In 2019, the RNBA with its partner NGOs completed community-led mapping of land tenure in 5 villages across 5 Districts in Manipur. More than 111 households were surveyed, and 145 Land tenure certificates were prepared and distributed by the partner NGOs and trained village youth under the guidance of the Village Authority, with the consent of the village communities and with technological support from RNBA and NRMCC-CLG. Following the issuance of the first set of land tenure certificates in 2019, the tribal community has requested additional assistance for mapping their agricultural parcels and homestead lands. It is expected that there is the potential for

expanding this mapping initiative to 10 districts across Manipur and Nagaland.

In just one year since the issuing of the LTCs, the land rights holders have started consolidating land uses¹⁹. Most of them are continuing to enrich and diversify the existing horticultural plantations and homestead agroforestry systems. Some farmers have used the certificate to benefit from having new varieties of paddy demonstrated on their land by the Central Agriculture University, Imphal. Moreover, as an indirect result of the increased land tenure awareness created by this program, some women self-help groups have also successfully negotiated with the village

authorities to obtain their endorsement for using forest lands on long term possession to regenerate and cultivate economic wild species for food and medicine.

Challenges

Processing of the maps and certificates is a time-intensive process, and cleaning and processing the data required external GIS expertise. Building local capacity (e.g. of RNBA team members or local tech-entrepreneurs) for data processing and hardware/software support and formalizing institutional linkages between these institutions and village level organizations (viz. Village Council and partner NGOs working locally) will be critical to expand and sustain the initiative.

The poor internet connectivity of the targeted communities also posed challenges. While the differential GPS (DGPS) devices were used to collect the mapping data and store it in their external storage, the data needed to be extracted/sent in online mode for processing. Thus, while conducting the

mapping offline was not a problem, the transfer of data from remote locations with poor internet connections was not always easy.

Ensuring that the LTC are accepted as legitimate tenure documentation not only by customary institutions, but also financial and government departments (viz. Agriculture, Horticulture etc.) in the hill districts requires endorsement and political buy-in from specialized institutions, such as the Autonomous District Council and the Hill Area Committee, which consists of members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from the hill areas. Scaling up land rights mapping and local digital land administration also requires institutionalization of these tasks at the Village Council (VC) level with due capacity building. While the RNBA network

has piloted this community-led mapping initiative through donor support and interaction with the VC in a limited number of villages, as well as some consultations with the ADC and other stakeholders, scaling up this initiative will require additional investment of resources and the formal involvement of these local Government institutions.



¹⁹ As per telephonic interviews with the RNBA NGO partners in August 2020; due to the COVID pandemic, quantitative ground level data could not be collected.

Lessons Learnt

1. Documented and transparent evidence of land rights can reduce conflicts in customary tenure landscapes viz the Hill districts of Manipur.

“Everyone’s forefather is right” – in the absence of a codified/documentated land law or a land document clearly showing the boundary and extent of a land parcel, communities and individuals with conflicting claims both commonly cite the oral histories of their forefathers as evidence of their rights in a land dispute. This has led to increasing conflicts over land in the hill districts of Manipur. By contrast, the Land Tenure Certificate provides documentary evidence of land rights recognized by the community, including a parcel map, that can be used to resolve future disputes.

2. A fit for purpose land administration solution can help village councils locally manage digital land administration and can be used to quickly document land tenure in the un-surveyed regions governed under customary regimes.

Accuracy is not a major concern in the Hill areas, as most of the parcel and plot sizes are relatively large, and field boundaries are not always clearly demarcated. Therefore, an incremental approach - adopting a Fit for Purpose (FFP) land administration model to support village authorities to issue simple land documentation and establish village land registries aligning with the customary tenure regime can be a solution for such areas. Simple and open-source land mapping applications that are easy to use and customisable can support customary land tenure mapping,

either through mobile GPS or with simple external DGPS antennae. In the absence of formal laws providing for the recording of customary land rights, a simple yet informal document like the LTC together with GIS maps recognized by the community authorities could be sufficient to provide increased tenure security and enhance access to public entitlements and land compensation for the hill tribes without compromising the local customary norms and authorities. The tenure recording process can be customized based on the customary practices of the respective communities without altering the spirit of their rules.

3. While a DGPS can provide better accuracy, it is difficult to operate in the Hills; alternative low-cost technology options, such as mobile phone-based mapping applications, may be more appropriate to the local topography and technical capacity.

The use of a DGPS mapping device, on the one hand, provided higher accuracy and seamless mapping in areas characterized by poor internet connectivity and dense canopy cover. On the other hand, it was difficult for the village youth surveyors to operate them in these remote conditions in the absence of regular field-level technical support from an external partner. The field operation involves setting up a base station and coordination with the rover and requires sufficient battery life for their continuous communication, which was difficult for a new operator to manage effectively alone while piloting in a village. The DGPS application also remains complex, as the base station and rover data have to be transferred for processing to provide accurate locational data. Regardless of the mapping technology used, it is important to develop systems for enhancing local access and control over the mapping system.

4. Scaling up mapping and land rights documentation in the Manipur Hill districts will require the political participation of higher-level tribal governance institutions, like the ADC and HAC, as well as champions within the State administration.

Scaling up and formalising this mapping process to build village registries and issue LTCs across the un-surveyed areas of the state will require the greater involvement of the ADCs while building consensus among the Hill Area Committees and CSOs in the hill districts on the viability and relevance of this approach. It may take time and dedicated communication campaigns to overcome long-held local fears that recording land rights will necessarily lead to the demise of customary tenure and the loss of customary authorities’ power. Still, this pilot suggests that supporting customary authorities to map and record existing customary land rights based on the existing customary norms and institutions, with state government officials providing umbrella support to the village authorities, could help improve land administration in the hill districts of the Manipur (and potentially other areas governed under customary tenure regimes) while preserving unique customary tenure systems and building customary authorities’ capacity.



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