

# *Role of Law in Development*

**Workshop Report  
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Convention Centre  
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New Delhi**

**Organised Jointly by**

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# Preface

Law is difficult to ignore when working towards social justice. Its competing qualities make it a contentious site for engagement. On the one hand, the political economy of law supports the socio economic privileges of class, caste and gender; on the other hand, law sets normative universal standards of non-discrimination, equality, and dignity as an alternative to the hierarchical, unequal social order. It is this positive quality that compels engagement with the law; as does the need to transform the substance, structures and practice of law to make it responsive and accessible to the disadvantaged and the poor.

It is to share, learn from and record the different field based initiatives in law that this workshop was jointly organised by Astha Sansthan, Udaipur and Partners for Law in Development [PLD], New Delhi. Astha, has worked for several years on issues of environment, tribal rights, and displacement - all of which have a legal dimension that they have had to engage with from time to time. PLD in contrast is relatively young organisation that aims to integrate law into development and social action. Both PLD and Astha have worked collaboratively on PLD's 'partnership project', which facilitates the attachment of a lawyer [or legal resource] to a NGO to help integrate law in the issue/s of concern to the NGO. PLD is committed to building, strengthening and promoting a culture of collaborative lawyering that treats law as a component of social action rather than an autonomous expertise. It perceives a role for law only in relation to supporting socio political movements and processes that resist discrimination, disadvantage and injustice. Towards this end, PLD seeks to explore innovative, non-formal and contextually relevant ways of using law:- to build a culture of human rights; to set popular normative standards based on equality, dignity and non discrimination; to influence alternative mediation systems within the community; and promote integration of law as a component in development action.

Given the common interest of both Astha and PLD, this workshop was jointly organised. PLD's project partners were invited to build a cross-sectoral community of lawyers and social workers committed to working together for social justice. PLD is extremely grateful to both Astha and Sida for their collaboration and support. Their solidarity to PLD's objectives was the basis for this workshop, and helped provide PLD and its project partners a valuable opportunity to come together, share, learn and grow from each other's experiences.

This report documents the proceedings and discussions of the workshop. It is hoped that the report serves as a resource not just for PLD, but all those engaged in re-visioning and re-constructing a new role for law: one that is relevant and responsive to addressing contexts of poverty, disadvantage and discrimination.

**Madhu Mehra**

[Executive Director, PLD]