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## Preface

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"Women's rights are human rights" has become a celebrated declaration since the Convention on Human Rights met in Vienna in 1993. It was also a theme of the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995. The challenge in this statement addresses the tendency in many countries to separate family or customary law from civil law and to view human rights through a narrow lens. This volume focuses on property rights to housing and land as a significant part of women's human rights. A huge transfer of assets is under way in the privatization reforms in China, Vietnam, and Laos with almost no attention to the gender dimensions of the transfer. The chapters here examine how transition policies affect women's rights as families get use and ownership titles to state and traditionally managed land and housing.

Although virtually every country that has become independent since World War II has included equality for women and men in its constitution, customary practices have tended to prevail. The demand that women have equal rights in all matters has focused on a woman's rights to control and safeguard her body—matters relating to domestic violence and reproduction. Because a woman without any economic base lacks power to demand such rights, providing income opportunities has preoccupied those organizations that support women. Yet, working without guarantees for shelter and some access to land use is crippling for most women in lower-income countries, and the absence of these guarantees in turn limits women's income opportunities.

Seeking out information on women's rights to house and land as presented in this book entailed the efforts of many graduate students: Jennifer Sowerwine and Lan-Chi Po at the University of California (UC), Berkeley; Wendy Madrigal and Lyn Jeffrey at UC Santa Cruz; and Donna Burr, Maigee Chang, and Anne Talsma at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. The Institute for Urban and Regional Development at UC Berkeley administered the project and assisted in editing; Barbara Hadenfeldt, Chris Amado, David Van Arnem, and Jenna Loyd were all unfailingly supportive. Jody Ranck and Jennifer Sowerwine commented thoughtfully on the manuscript.

A meeting of Asian and U.S. authors was held at Berkeley and Monterey with support from the Social Science Research Council and the University of California's Pacific Rim Grant. Discussions during this initial reading of the papers benefited from comments by Diane Wolf, UC Davis; Gisele Bousquet, Fresno State University; and Chanthem Latmani, Lao Women's Union, in addition to the other contributors. Sandra Morgen, University of Oregon; Lousie Lamphere, University of New Mexico; Margaret Swain, UC Davis; Le Thi Quy, Center for Family and Women's Studies; and Hai-Ping Luo, Wright State University, added to the discussions. Thanks must go to Executive Chancellor Carol Christ, Dean of International and Area Studies (IAS) Richard Buxbaum, and Executive Director of IAS David Szanton, who graced the reception for the participants and supported the project throughout.

Kathy Martin, secretary of the Office of Women in International Development (WID) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Silva Dushka and Aida Orgocka, research assistants, rendered assistance during the final stages of production when Gale became director of the WID office in 1998. The Ford Foundation regional offices and headquarters have given information and financial support throughout the project; special thanks go to Oscar Salemkink in Hanoi.

The editors wish to extend particular thanks to Carol Ireson-Doolittle, whose knowledge of Laos has been of critical importance to clarifying issues in this little known country. In Hanoi, Heather Grady, Oxfam United Kingdom and Ireland, briefed us about land issues and the role of nongovernmental organizations in Vietnam. At Lynne Rienner, Bridget Julian, acquisitions editor, and Shena Redmond, senior project editor, prompted us through the intricacies of production with humor and persistence; we are deeply indebted.

Gale and Irene wish to compliment each other for their work together. Special thanks to Tai and Tommy, Gale's sons, for perseverance through the demands of research and writing. Irene's husband, Millidge Walker, provided inestimable solace as chauffeur, host, reader, and companion. Finally, we extend thanks to the contributors to this volume, who overcame language and cultural differences and heavy demands on their time to collaborate on this project.

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