

## ‘Right to Food Bangladesh’ Charter

### Introduction

Countrywide ‘Right to Food Campaign’ was initiated centering the event ‘South Asia Right to Food Conference-SARF 2015’ held on 30, 31 May and 1 June 2015 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Later, at the last day of the SARF Conference, the civil society declared the ‘Right to Food Bangladesh’ as an Umbrella network of organizations, network and individuals working on issues relevant to Right to Food. This umbrella network will connect and elaborate the civil society mechanism process on right to food issues in Bangladesh. The major objectives of this ‘Right to Food Bangladesh’ Movement is to share experiences of civil societies on Right to Food & nutritional security movements, strengthen networking among all the relevant stakeholders, organizations and networks for effective campaign. We want to promote ‘Legal Framework on Right to Food’ with engaging policy makers with our perspectives and strategy building on Right to Food & nutritional security movement for all relevant actors. The right to adequate food and nutrition links with the lot of issues and so many emerging challenges—not just conceptually but also on the ground, in peoples’ struggles. Civil society organizations and social movements representing various constituencies of rights-holders—peasants, fisherfolks, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, rural women, food and agricultural workers, urban workers, and others—are increasingly joining forces to advance their common goals, with human rights as unifying factor. Many obstacles stand in the way of implementing the right to food in our country. To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to develop intersectoral and holistic policies and laws based on human rights that can enable people to regain control of the food system.

A primary element in ‘Right to Food Bangladesh’ is promoting investment in agriculture and food systems should be accomplished with coherent and transparent policies, laws and regulations based on equitable, inclusive, and gender sensitive governance structures in the context of Bangladesh

### Considering this context, we hereby adopt the following Charter of Right to Food Bangladesh

*Conceding* the positive changes have seen in recent years in the policy level related to the issue of food and nutritional security

*Also acknowledging* the positive growth performance that our agricultural sector has been registering in recent years

*Concerned* that a significant proportion of our population still remains vulnerable to the challenges of economic marginalization, hunger and malnutrition, despite the positive achievements registered recently in the issue of food and nutritional security, agriculture and economic growth

*Also concerned* over the heavy and growing dependence of our production systems and consumption patterns on external factors (climate change, global markets, amongst others,) and their associated vulnerabilities to such external factors as climate variability and change as well as to global economic and political shocks

*Reaffirming* our resolve towards ensuring, through deliberate and support, that all segments of our populations, particularly women, the youth, and other disadvantaged sectors of our societies, must participate and directly benefit from the growth and transformation opportunities to improve their lives and livelihoods.

***Reflecting** that hunger and malnutrition are major causes of poverty and underdevelopment in Bangladesh by causing poor health, low levels of energy, and mental impairment, all leading to low productivity and low educational attainment all of which can in turn lead to even greater hunger and malnutrition, thereby creating a viscous cycle.*

***Agitated** that there is limited progress made in agro-industries and agribusiness development, which hampers value addition and competitiveness of our products in trade local, regional, and international; and undermines the potential of the sector in transformation and generation of gainful employment opportunities.*

***Stressing** the significance of enhancing conservation and sustainable use of all of our natural resources including land, water, plant, livestock, fisherfolks and aquaculture, and forestry, through coherent policies as well as governance and institutional arrangements at national level, to realize their huge potential to ensure food and nutritional security.*

***Recognizing** the complementary roles and responsibilities that should be enhanced among the relevant stakeholders, including public, private, civil societies, farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, in ensuring food and nutritional rights across the country.*

**[Recognizing that addressing food and nutritional insecurity depends on a number of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to work, the right to education, the right to health, the right to social security and the right to an adequate standard of living]**

**'Right to Food Bangladesh' will raise voice on following issue**

**1. Commitment to End Hunger in Bangladesh by 2025**

Poverty and hunger is related to each other. Bangladesh has made significant progress in achieving Millennium Development Goals in poverty reduction. Simultaneously, Bangladesh has given its consent over the Zero Hunger Declaration of the United Nations, where all countries of the world, particularly, Asia and the Asia Pacific region have made commitment of eradicating their hunger and poverty by 2025. Following MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is accepted in the current year, where commitment has been made for eradication of hunger and poverty from the world. Adequate government initiatives have to be ensured in eradicating hunger and poverty.

**2. Right to adequate food, nutritional security and food sovereignty for all people**

The essential needs of people for their everyday life (food, cloth, settlement, treatment and education) are the basic human rights. As per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), article 25(1), 'every citizen has their right to receive adequate quality food, cloth, house, treatment and necessary services for the welfare and good health of each individual and their families. They have also the rights of safety, if they are unemployed, ill, physically unable, widow, old or causes beyond their control for maintaining their livelihoods'. Principles of human rights are undividable, universal, undeniable and inherent. In that sense, food right is a human right. Ensuring food right along with other rights included in human rights is essential. This is not a charity; rather, every citizen will be capable in earning ones food, which is the aim of right to food. Nutritional security is strongly related with food security. The number of babies with low weight and height has been increasing due to increased rate of child malnutrition. So, along with the food security, ensuring nutritional security is also essential. Food sovereignty means access to healthy and culturally accepted food for people produced in an environment friendly and sustainable process. This includes rights of deciding their own food and agricultural system. The state, considering this entire context, would have to take active initiative to ensure the rights of food and nutritional security and food sovereignty.

**3. Formulating legal framework and its implementation to ensure adequate food and nutritional security for all the people**

A well furnished food policy and social safety net programme with many good objectives are existent in the country. But, proper implementation of policies and programme is not taking place. Though state admits access to food as basic need, they do not accept it as their 'right' yet. This turns all the initiatives taken for food security by the government as a service only. Any implementation processes normally speed up if there is a legal obligation; because if there is no implementation exists it leaves the scope for the people and organizations to complain legally and ensure their rights. Considering this context, state should formulate legal framework and its implementation to ensure the food and nutritional security for its people.

**4. Transforming Social Safety Net Programme from a right based perspective and including it in right to food legal framework**

Currently, more than a hundred social safety net programmes are being implemented for the food and livelihoods security of hardcore poor and marginal people. The aim of this programme is to ensure food security of the vulnerable and poor people, prevent malnutrition, keep food price stable, provide food assistance during disasters and in the lean season, help the beneficiaries for their social and economic development temporarily and provide skills development training. There exist diversified problems in implementing this programme including selection of appropriate beneficiaries in some cases. National Social Security Strategy- NSSS has been accepted recently for development of this programme. In the strategy paper, provision has been kept for mid-day meal for every school going children and fund has been allocated partially in the current budget for its implementation. There has been some progress in implementation of this programme, but still its expected results are questionable. So, transforming the social safety net programme from a right based perspective and including it in the right to food act is recommended.

**5. Development of agriculture sector and food production process prioritizing small food producer and entrepreneurs**

Due to positive efforts of the government, Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in some cases of food grains production. Small producers and entrepreneurs play important role in agriculture and agriculture related food production in Bangladesh. For development of agricultural sector in the country, we need to make supply of seed-fertilizer-pesticide available, expand irrigation facilities and make it low cost, take adequate measures for preservation of crops, expand the limit of credit in agriculture with easy access, ensure fair price of crops produced by the farmers, provide subsidy directly to the small farmers and need to ensure admission of the women engaged in agriculture sector and related work. Right to market access for the small food and agricultural producers need to be ensured. Simultaneously, creating scope of work, fair wages and access to market for the small food producers and agricultural producers, particularly, women and youth associated with the agricultural value chain system need to be ensured. Long term planning, budget allocation and technical assistance are needed for implementation of food right and women, small producers and local entrepreneurs should have to be linked and ensured sustainable food production process. To ensure responsive investment in agricultural sector, necessary policies, institutional rules and regulations and process for cooperation have to be formulated and functional.

**6. Climate Resilient Community to be built in implementing Food Rights**

Climate change has substantial impact on the implementation of right to foods. Bangladesh is one of the worst victims of climate change effect. In one hand, agricultural production system is affected by climate change, on the other hand, livelihoods of people is also severely impacted in all over the country; especially in coastal areas. Actions need to be taken at community level towards disaster risk reduction, capacity building to combat the climate change effects and building Climate Resilient Community to implement the right to food initiative.

**7. Ensuring adulteration and chemical free safe food**

The aspect of safe food is closely related with right to food. The 'safe food act' was accepted in 2013 by the government. But, there is no initiative in implementing the act yet. The state has to ensure the access to adulteration and chemical free safe food for all people.

**8. Ensuring education, good health and employment for all to implement food rights**

Right to education, health, employment are basic human rights along with the right to food. Considering this the state would have to take all necessary measures for education, health and employment for all the people to implementing the right to food effectively.

**9. Coordination among related policies and acts (land, fisheries, livestock, water, forest, etc.) to be done**

The above mentioned aspects are related to effective implementation of food rights in various ways. However, in those fields, the right to food issue is absent in the policies and acts already formulated in country. Considering the context, coordination need to be done in the concerned policies and acts of land, fisheries, livestock resources improvement, water, forest, etc. for effective functioning of food rights.

**10. Ensuring gender equality in all 'food and nutrition' related national policies, acts and in their implementation**

Presently, the 'women centered poverty' has come up as a new phenomenon in our country along with other developing countries. It is evident that amongst the poor people, the number of women is more than men. Access to the food production related resources (inputs) for the women has to be ensured impartially and with full legitimacy including land ownership, finance, education, training, all social avenues, employment and just and equal wages at work place. Gender equality has to be ensured in the implementation process of all national policies and acts related to food and nutritional security through necessary initiatives by the all actors concerned.

**11. Activating mandate of SAARC Food Bank and process of establishing SAARC seed bank**

SAARC Food Bank was formed in 2007 as a regional food bank by the SAARC Countries considering necessity of food deficit and crisis at among SAARC countries. Another objective if this food bank was to provide regional supports to national food security initiatives; improve inter-country partnership and meet the food deficit through coordinated regional efforts. However, the process of SAARC Food Bank formation has not been effective yet. On the other hand, the process for formation of SAARC Seed Bank has begun but necessary decisions have not been made yet. The Government of Bangladesh will have to play effective role in activating the mandate of SAARC Food Bank and establishing SAARC Seed Bank.

## 12. Ensuring scope for peoples' participation, accountability and transparency in all decision making process

Participation of all partners' representatives has to be ensured in the food rights and nutritional security related decision making process of the Government of Bangladesh. Simultaneously, information related to implementation of various programme by the Government has to be presented to the mass people and scope for peoples' auditing should be kept open to ensure transparency and accountability.

Agreeing solidarity with the above mentioned 'Right to Food Bangladesh' Charter, our organization/network/personally, I myself, signing this document willfully and consciously. *(Based on the meeting decisions of 16<sup>th</sup> September, Chief of the member organizations or network of the National Committee would select one representative in the following place)*

Name of organization/network.....

Name of the Chief of the organization/network .....

Signature of the Chief of the organization/network.....

Date:.....

Name of selected Representative of the organization/network.....

Designation:.....

খাদ্য অধিকার বাংলাদেশ  
RIGHT TO FOOD BANGLADESH