



South Asia Right to Food Conference 2015 and Emergence of Right to Food Bangladesh Network



Adoption and implementation of legal framework is imperative to ensure right to food

South Asia Right to Food (SARF) Conference 2015

The South Asia Right to Food Conference 2015, hosted first ever in Bangladesh from May 30 to June 1, 2015 in Dhaka was a huge event both in terms of scale and scope. *Anti Poverty Platform- APP** initiated organizing the Conference in collaboration with different entities and organizations.

It was an event of critical significance in the context of the people's right to food in this part of the world. While right to food as an issue had featured in discussions in different circles and forums, it gathered a sense of urgency and momentum like never before since this momentous conference. It is high time the CSOs, NGOs and rights organizations push through this agenda of ours and make sure the 'right to food' issue keeps gaining in currency and stay high on the public policy agenda.

Divided into 13 parallel sessions, 4 plenaries and 2 special sessions the historic conference brought together some of the brightest minds of the South Asia region to deliberate on one of the most intractable challenges of the time – food security. Some of the speakers diagnosed the social, economic and political aspects of the issue, while others used the gender and legal lenses to analyze it. And the result was a myriad of recommendations to create a future where everyone has his or her right to food fulfilled.

The conference saw the emergence of an umbrella platform named as "Right to Food Bangladesh (RtF BD) Network" which formulated a charter to take forward the movement by mobilizing the like-minded organizations and rights-holders. The conference also resulted in a "16 points Dhaka Declaration", a road map towards achieving food security for all in the region.

The conference drew representatives from governments, national and international



Skeikh Hasina, Prime Minister, People's Republic of Bangladesh, who adorned the conference as the Chief Guest, stressed on the need for combined efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger from the region. She also renewed the call for setting up the SAARC Food Bank urging it to be "a friend of need so that none dies of starvation in our region". Regarding legislation related to right to food the PM expressed her government's commitment to formulating and enforcing laws to enhance food and agriculture production and ensure food and nutritional security for all.

non-government organizations, statutory bodies, multilateral and bilateral donors, academia, women's organizations, trade bodies, peasants' organizations, think tanks and other parts of the society. More than 2000 participants including 50 delegates from 15 different countries including Bangladesh and other countries of South Asia took part in the conference. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina MP inaugurated the regional conference that saw among other distinguished guests a noble laureate, Kailash Satyarthi.

The 16-point Dhaka Declaration

The 16 points Dhaka Declaration registered the major discussion points of the conference and charted a road map towards achieving food security for all in the region. The declaration urges the various stakeholders to unite under

a network so that the movement can be taken towards its logical end. It attaches particular importance on establishing a legal framework to guarantee this right. It urges greater investment in agriculture, calls for transparency and accountability in

governments and denounces large corporations impinging on farmers' access to land and seeds. It then vows to stand beside the small and marginalized producers and those discriminated on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, gender, class etc and fight for their right to food.

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Advocate Md. Qamrul Islam MP, Minister, Ministry of Food and Special Guest at the ceremony, observed that the conference could play an important role in supporting SAARC initiatives on regional food security. He also shared the various steps that the Bangladesh Government undertook to achieve food and nutritional security, including the ongoing formulation and implementation of a country investment plan.



"Right to food is inter-related to right to inclusive development"

- Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi

"Human being should be placed at the center of our development efforts. None should be left excluded and everybody must have access to education, health service, employment, and most importantly, food".

- Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad Eminent Economist
Chairman, PKSf and Chair of the Organizing Committee, SARF Conference 2015



"Let us vow today to turn our world into a hunger free world so that every citizen of the planet has his/her right to food ensured along with other basic rights."

- Dr A A M S Arefin Siddique VC of University of Dhaka and Co-Chair, SARF Conference 2015



"Without firm provisioning in the constitution, crafting of policies and enactment of laws, the aspiration of people for the full enjoyment of right to adequate food and food sovereignty may remain only as a dream."

- Dr Sarba Raj Khadka
National Coordinator,
National Coordination
Committee, National
Network on Right to Food,
Nepal (RtFN)

"Adoption and implementation of legal framework is imperative to ensure right to food".

- Mohsin Ali Secretary, Organizing Committee, SARF Conference 2015 & Convener, Anti Poverty Platform- APP and ED, WAVE Foundation



Anti Poverty Platform-APP, a platform of national & international NGOs, networks, alliances and civil society organizations, originated in 2009. APP runs campaign and advocates for policy reforms at national level on multifaceted issues related to eradicating poverty and hunger. Over the years APP embraced issues like food security, agriculture, social safety net, employment etc. Since 2012 APP has been carrying out country-wide campaign on Right to Food issue and in 2013, the platform started focusing on enacting Right to Food Act in Bangladesh. Having realized that a regional approach to ensuring food security could prove more effective APP in 2014 organized the like-minded civil society organizations under an umbrella to organize South Asia Right to Food Conference 2015. WAVE Foundation carries out secretarial role of APP.



highlights of the discussion

South Asia Right to Food Conference 2015

Enact law to ensure right to food and nutritional security

Absence of legal provision is identified as a major obstacle by many. Though the article 15 of Bangladesh constitution acknowledges people's right to food, there is no law to fulfil that right. Some 40 countries around the world have recognized the right to food as a human right and enacted laws to protect that right. Some experts focused on nutritious food and safe food besides "right to food" because malnutrition and unsafe food remains a huge challenge for a significant population in South Asia.

Strengthen social protection

Experts defined 'social protection' broadly and included in it various food distribution mechanism to ensure that the most needy have access to food. Speakers mentioned some of the successful social protection programs carried out in Bangladesh and other countries. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, programs such as controlling market prices through OMS, VGF, VGD and Stipend for Primary School students got highlighted. However, corruption and nepotism were cited as factors that do not allow the benefit of such programs reaching out fully to the intended population. The system must have intensive monitoring mechanism to ensure the right people get them.

The Right to Food Bangladesh (RtF BD) network emerged on the last day of the SARF conference 2015 along with the like-minded organizations and rights-holders such as peasants, fishermen, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, rural women, agricultural workers, urban workers etc. with a view to establishing their rights to food. It also seeks to engage with the policymakers to push for ensuring people's right to food by establishing supportive legal framework. The RtF BD adopted a charter to lay out the principles Governing the movement. The RtF BD is basically the new phase of the *Anti Poverty Platform-APP*, which practically dissolved at the end of the conference.

The Charter takes into consideration the plight of people who are vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition despite the general economic growth gained in recent decades. It identifies the existing production and distribution system, unreliable price of agricultural produce and impact of climate change as major factors creating that vulnerability. And the charter then records its resolve to strive towards ensuring the right to food for all.

Emergence of Right to

Objectives

- To strengthen Right to Food Bangladesh network at local and national level and reinforcing south Asia region and international process for participation, non-discrimination and empowerment of citizens for solidarity and communicative action.
- To establish a legal framework and regulatory provisions to guarantee citizens' right to adequate food and nutritional security.
- To monitor the social protection program based on NSSS, Seventh Five Year Plan and SDGs for improved implementation towards achieving the Right to Food.
- To safeguard and ensure the sovereign rights of small farmers, local food producers and communities to the biodiversity, right to work and employment, access to seed and market for their agricultural products.
- To monitor and measure the adequacy in a rights-based perspective of land ownership and tenure rights, food safety, food wastage, water rights and consumer protection agencies' legal, regulatory and institutional structures and the mandates of relevant institutions.

VISION

A Hunger and Poverty Free Just Society

MISSION

Ensure Right to Food and Nutritional security for citizens and especially for the poor, marginalized, women and children.



Right to Food i

Reform land ownership and Greater investment on agriculture

Reforming land ownership was also part of the discussion. Experts mentioned that only 10% of farmers own land and the ever shrinking agricultural land by the ever expanding urbanization. Such trend can only jeopardize food security of the landless mass.

Special importance was attached to greater government investment into agriculture. There has to be higher use of advanced technology to enhance production as well as diversification of food sources such as fish, milk and meat that have good nutritional value. Again loan support to farmers and subsidy to small farmers were mentioned by speakers.

Ensure gender equality to ensure Right to Food

The gender dimension of food security also received significant importance. A study was cited that showed that countries with women having no land right have 60% more malnourished children compared to those with women having land right. Experts mentioned that women are engaged in producing 50% of food and 60% of the household work but only earn 10% of income. This situation needs to change and for that to happen the agricultural policies in many countries have to be gender-sensitive.

Speakers believed that establishing gender equality is a prerequisite for ensuring right to food. The onus however is on women, they need to unite and put up a strong fight against patriarchy and change the existing power relations which is heavily tilted towards men.

Food Bangladesh (RtF BD) Network

Intervention Strategies

- Gathering best practices from national programs on food and nutritional security to use them to influence stakeholders and inform policies.
- Lobbying with the governments to create state accountability mechanisms around food security and reducing hunger through lobbying, alliance building and social mobilization.
- Monitoring the implementation of the NSSS and Right to Food legislation as part of a civil society coalition. The strategy includes disaggregated budget tracking and auditing by gender, ethnic groups, Adivasi, disadvantaged and marginalized groups and monitoring the effectiveness of social protection schemes to highlight gaps as a basis for advocating for appropriate changes in resource allocation.
- Raise public awareness through media campaign and other effective initiatives like celebrities issuing call to action about their role and responsibility with regard to ensuring their right to food.
- Influencing governments, banks and other financial institutions to lend more institutional credit and provide institutional support like extension services, crop insurance, irrigation, access to other technological and agro ecology solutions for women farmers, producers, fishermen and other marginalized people as part of 'responsible investment'.
- Strategic partnerships with government and influential institutions (Law and Food Ministry/Planning commissions, Bilateral and Multilateral organizations, FAO and think tanks etc.) to facilitate framing of the law and policies required to establish people's food security.
- Linkage with relevant regional and international initiatives to promote Right to Food. Promote South Asian civil society networks on right to food. Initiate various joint initiatives by the South Asian Civil Society and promote status of SAARC Food Bank and Seed Bank.

Way forward

The platform will continue its campaign and facilitate the process of enacting a law to guarantee right to food by involving the pertinent stakeholders and mobilizing public opinion. It will focus on influencing the government to undertake steps with the ultimate goal having the Right to Food Act in near future. Besides, critical observations on policies or laws which are discriminatory or violate people's right to food and nutritional security are also imperative to pursue review proposition to the government. RtF BD will learn from in-country situation, regional and international experiences in formulating a persuasive research document in the form of legal framework for ensuring the food and nutritional rights of the people of Bangladesh.

Adapting to the changing climate

Climate change has tremendous implications on food production and thereby food security. Speakers started by highlighting the need for holding the industrialized developed countries accountable because their share in carbon emission is disproportionately high compared to the developing countries. They called for joint efforts by governments and NGOs to put pressure on the rich governments to make sure they help out the countries facing the impact of climate change. They should provide grants as the vulnerable countries are demanding, not loan as being suggested by the climate change offenders, the speakers stressed.

Adopting new technologies and carrying out high quality research are also critical in the context of adapting to the changing climate. The countries in this region are particularly vulnerable as manifested by the heightened frequency and intensity of disasters, loss of biodiversity resulting into falling agricultural yield and the resultant food insecurity. It is important to invest on research to innovate and adopt new means of cultivation to offset the impact of climate change. For instance, saline tolerant and drought tolerant seeds are being discovered. Neighboring countries need to exchange ideas and technologies to fight this common problem. Some local level initiatives such as educating public about climate change, harvesting rain water for irrigation, effective early warning system, climate risk mapping for hotspot identification were also mentioned by speakers.

Solidarity between government and civil societies in the region

The regional conference also opined in favor of enhancing solidarity among the NGOs and civil society organizations across the region. It would facilitate people to people interaction and nurture greater understanding and fellow feeling among peoples who share, in some cases, common cultural, historical and even political background. Again, nurturing solidarity at the government and civil society level would also facilitate exchange of ideas, specially in terms of finding solutions to food insecurity. Greater understanding would also help forge greater force and push for reform in legal, economic, agricultural policies that are more favorable to ensuring right to food.

Speakers mentioned frequent natural calamities, hostile spell of weather and poor governance that have created food crisis in the region time and again. SAARC Food bank and Seed bank also came up as recommendations. A regional food bank could be an effective response to such crisis faced by certain group of population in one country or more. The call for seed bank emerged out of the ever increasing concern of the ownership of seeds getting into the hands of the large corporations. Seeds should be considered as common property and a public good, speakers suggested. The example of Colombia was cited where storage of seeds is illegal. ■■

Organizers of SARF Conference 2015

Scores of national and international organizations, institutions, networks, development partners and other relevant entities teamed up to realize such a vast and significant conference. Some were directly involved in organizing the conference while others provided technical assistance to make the conference a grand success. The organizations that contributed to organizing the conference-

- Anti Poverty Platform-APP
- University of Dhaka
- NHRC
- PKSF
- Oxfam
- MJF
- IFSN
- GIZ
- BRAC
- Care Bangladesh
- World Vision Bangladesh
- DanChurchAid Bangladesh
- Practical Action Bangladesh
- UDDIPAN
- AFSN
- Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
- ChristianAid
- Wateraid
- INCIDIN Bangladesh
- WAVE Foundation
- DSK
- RDRS Bangladesh
- ActionAid Bangladesh
- ACLAB
- Angikar Shamaj Bikash Kendra
- Bangladesh Krishok Federation
- BMBS
- BNPS
- BUP
- CAMPE
- Dhoritri Foundation
- Equitybd
- Governance Coalition
- Hunger Free World
- IED
- Karmajibi Nari
- KHANI Bangladesh (Food Network)
- Nari Maitree
- NRDS
- Steps Towards Development
- SUPRO
- Unnayan Bhabna
- UST

Right to Food

Distinguished guests and speakers of South Asia Right to Food Conference 2015



Abul Maal Abdul Muhith MP
Minister, Ministry of Finance
People's Republic
of Bangladesh



Amir Hossain Amu MP
Minister, Ministry of
Industry
People's Republic
of Bangladesh



Begum Matia Chowdhury MP
Minister, Ministry of
Agriculture
People's Republic
of Bangladesh



Rashed Khan Menon MP
Minister, Ministry of
Civil Aviation
and Tourism, People's
Republic of Bangladesh



Syed Mohsin Ali MP
Minister, Ministry of Social
Welfare, People's
Republic of Bangladesh



Fazle Hossain Badsha MP
Member of Parliament
Bangladesh National
Parliament



Shirin Akhter MP
Member of Parliament
Bangladesh National
Parliament



Justice A. B. M. Khairul Haque
Chairman, Law Commission
Bangladesh



Dr. Atiur Rahman
Governor
Bangladesh Bank



Md. Abdul Karim
Managing Director
PKSF



Dr. Mahabub Hossain
Agricultural and Development
Economist, Bangladesh



Flavio Valente
General Secretary
FIAN International
Brazil



Harsh Mander
Director
Centre for Equity Studies
India



Alberta Guerra
Food Policy Advisor
IFSN Italy



Thierry Kesteloot
Agriculture and Trade Advisor
Oxfam-Solidarity Belgium



Professor Dr. Amitabh Kundu
Senior Fellow
Delhi Policy Group



Professor ABM Faroque
Former Dean
Faculty of Pharmacy
University of Dhaka



Professor Dr. M M Akash
Department of Economics
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Dr. Surendra Bahadur Thapa
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Shaheen Anam
Executive Director
Manusher Jonno Foundation



Snehal V. Soneji
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Oxfam in Bangladesh



A K M Musha
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Concern Worldwide
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Policy Advisor
Food and Climate Justice
Oxfam Netherlands



A.F.M. Shahidur Rahman
Global Coordinator
IFSN



Biraj Patnaik
Principal Advisor
Office of the Commissioners
of the Supreme Court India



Kavita Srivastava
Vice President
Peoples Union for Civil Liberties
(PUCL), India



Dr. Ujjaini Halim
CSM-South Asia
Representative Kolkata
India



Muhammad Hilaluddin
President
Angikar Samaj Bikash Kendra



Ratan Sarkar
Executive Director
INCIDIN Bangladesh



Imranul Haq Chowdhury
Executive Director
UDDIPAN



Ranjan Karmaker
Executive Director
Steps Towards Development



Dr. Faruk Ul Islam
Acting Country Director
Practical Action



Monisha Biswas
GROW Country Lead
Oxfam in Bangladesh



Raju Chapagain
FAO
Nepal



Nasir Aziz
Policy Officer
Action Aid Pakistan



Yogita Roy
Program Manager
Right to Food Network
Nepal



Tawheed Reza Noor
Managing Director
Unnayan Bhabna



Ataur Rahman Miton
Country Director
Hunger Free World



Syed Tarikul Islam
Executive Director
ACLAB



Shaheen Akter Dolly
Executive Director
Nari Maitree



Anowarul Haq
Director
Extreme Rural Poverty Program (ERPP)
CARE Bangladesh



Dr. Jashim Uddin
Deputy Managing Director
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Abdur Rahman
Regional Project Coordinator
DanChurchAid Bangladesh



Asgar Ali Sabri
Director
Action Aid Bangladesh



Chandan Z. Gomes
Advocacy Director, World Vision
Bangladesh



Sk. Mojibul Haq
Program Manager
BRAC



Shahidul Islam
Coordinator
KHANI Bangladesh



SPECIAL SESSION

1. Right to Food: Bangladesh Situation
2. Right to Food: Role of Social Safety Net Program- Bangladesh Perspective

PLENARY

1. Right to Food and Nutritional Security in South Asia
2. Investment in Agriculture Across the Region
3. Governance of Land and Forest Tenure and Other Natural Resources
4. Right to Food: Legal Frameworks in South Asia



PARALLEL SESSION

1. Food Security in the Context of Climate Vulnerability in South Asia
2. Food security, climate change and technological options.
3. SAARC Seed Bank : The potentials and challenges of the small and marginal farmers of South Asian region
4. Right to Food and Social Protection in South Asia –A Policy Mapping Study and GAP Analysis
5. Mid Day Meal
6. Gender Equity and Rural Employment: Pathway to Food Security
7. Issues and Concerns of Right to Adequate Food: Civil Society Perspectives
8. Alternatives to Corporate Agriculture: Case Studies from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan Cambodia & Vietnam.
9. Food and Nutrition Security in Bangladesh: Experiences with Agricultural Extension Services for Smallholder Farmers and Women
10. Trade and food Security in South Asia: WTO and beyond
11. Towards Legal Recognition of Right to Food in Bangladesh
12. Food Security for the River Eroded Vulnerable Extreme Poor People of the North-western Bangladesh & Food and nutritional security for the Urban Poor of major Cities in Bangladesh
13. Right to Food: Economic Justice for Women

Please visit www.rtfbangladesh.org to know detail about Right to Food Bangladesh (RtF BD) Network.

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