Concept Note

Asia-Pacific Right to Food and Agrifood System Conference (APRAC)

State of Right to Food and Nutrition

The right to adequate food, recognized by the UDHR [1] and ICESCR [2] is a universal human and legal right. This right refers to all human beings having the right to food with sufficient quantity, nutritionally and culturally adequate and physically and economically accessible. In 2004, the Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO) Council adopted human rights-based Voluntary Guidelines 'the Right to Food' that articulated policy guidance for action to the realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. Moreover, it protects the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition (FAO, 2005). It underscores a high level of accountability, political commitment and support with effective implementation and monitoring mechanism. Equally, it provides special attention on meaningful participation of civil society including the representatives of the most marginalized population towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate food. It indicates the role of the state to respect, protect and fulfil this voluntary guideline. It urges Governments' actions to protect people from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition following principle of non-discrimination. In 2009, [3]states echoed their commitment to set a pathway to achieving the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. It is worth noting that many countries including South Asian countries like Nepal and India took legislative actions either including the right to food in the constitution or adopting a framework law on the right to adequate food. However, it is evident that multiple stresses, for example, COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine together with climatic stresses, ecological crisis and inequality set back the effort of addressing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms and make it more challenging and uncertain. In fact, the number of hungry people has been increasing since 2017 (FAO, 2021). The report reveals that nearly one in three people in the world (2.3 billion) did not have access to adequate food in 2021 and that almost 3.1 billion people could not afford a healthy diet in 2020. The alarmingly high prevalence of acute food insecurity and malnutrition starkly highlights the fragility of agrifood systems and insufficient political commitment in the face of a more challenging and uncertain context. It has exacerbated the whole hunger crisis and generated new epicentres of hunger across the globe. The 2022 Oxfam report reveals that COVID-19 pandemic added fuel to the fire of the food crisis for undernourished people amidst environmental degradation, and inequality that millions of small-scale food producers and workers are already struggling. The global humanitarian organizations of 75 countries unmask the acute global hunger crisis in an open letter expressed to the 77th UN General Assembly estimated a person is dying of hunger every four seconds (OXFAM International, 2022).

[1]Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
[2] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
[3] The World Summit on Food Security, organised by FAO

FAO statistics[4] suggest that in the last two decades (2000-2019) production of major agricultural products have increased remarkably (details in Annex 1) but the right to food is highly undermined and it is far behind in achieving zero hunger. Rather, the food crisis created "62 new food billionaires" since the beginning of the pandemic. These corporate empires do not trade in food — they trade in starvation of billions of people (Lighthouse Europe, 2022). It indicates that the corporate led agri-food system and its governance has trapped millions of people in hunger on a planet that produces more than enough food for everyone. The pandemic together with social structures, lack of access to information and inputs to fight food insecurity may trigger gender inequality in the prevalence of food insecurity. In addition, this food and nutrition insecurity disproportionately affects not only women but also their children (FAO, IFAD 2021).

It seems that the agenda 2030 "leave no one behind," remains as a critical challenge as long as structural barriers, inequality, climate change, and economic downturns are not addressed. Moreover, amidst these multifaceted challenges together with global pandemic appears as extremely difficult to navigate the right trajectory for achieving the goal of Zero Hunger, SDG 2 by 2030, and the previous progress also becomes shattered and unsustainable. The CFS[5] also highlights the importance of sustainable agriculture and food systems to respond to the state of food insecurity and the global food crisis, due to multiple conflicts, ecological and economic shocks.

Context

Asia and the Pacific Region has the world's largest population representing more than half of the planet, around 4.68 billion people and Asia also represents more than half of the world's undernourished people about 425 million (The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022, FAO). This report also reveals that the region is home to 54% of the world's hungry people and more than quarter of its population experience moderate or severe food insecurity. The report also revealed that three out of ten extreme hunger hotspots (Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria) together with emerging new hunger hotspots India belong to this region (World Food Programme, 2020).

The people of Bangladesh also experience hunger and moderate or severe food insecurity amidst the disrupted supply chains, inflation, global grain, fertilizer and energy price hike. The report highlights that prevalence of undernourishment is found among 18.8 million people that account for 11.4% of total population. It also shows that the prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15-49 affects 16.8 million women representing 36.7 % women. It also shows that above 120 million people in the country cannot afford a healthy diet (FAO, 2022). In the 2022 Global Hunger Index, Bangladesh ranks 84th out of the 121 countries with a score of 19.6, that is classified as moderate hunger.

Agrifood system and its governance

The agrifood system is a holistic but complex system[6] that includes a wide range of actors and stakeholders[7]. It interlinks the economic, environmental, social and cultural functions of agriculture and food that should promote equitable access to food, land, water, capital, inputs,

[4]FAO statistical yearbook 2022

5 The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all.

6 All grown, produced, consumed, traded, transported, stored, distributed, processed and marketed food are integrated in this system

7 Small-scale family farmers and farm workers, landless, sharecroppers, rural women, Agro processor, youth, mountain farmers fisherfolks, forest dwellers, pastoralists and herders, Indigenous Peoples, urban poor, workers working in food supply chain, consumers and private sector companies as integral part of the agrifood system. They comprise all food products that originate from crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as the broader economic, societal and natural environments.

technologies and markets. The transformation of the system and its governance is a core concept for collective survival for navigating and reaching the Global Goals for human rights, right to food, equality, social justice, and climate crisis. Multiple neoliberalism factors like industrialisation, 'supermarketization' and financialization together with ecological constraints have contributed to the destruction of local food systems, increased global hunger, malnutrition, obesity and promoted corporate led industrial agri-food systems (Cambridge university,2020). This industrial Agrifood system facilitated by neoliberal ideology, trade and agreement on Agriculture suggested by the World Trade Organization (WTO) also increases inequality and food importation together with emergence of water and land pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and the rise of global pandemics. The multinational corporations (details in Annex 3) monopolize and impose the use of transgenic seeds and get benefit from agribusiness and the industrial mode of production across its stages, from machinery to fertilizers to trade. Each year, tens of millions of subsistence farmers are forced from their land by multinational agribusinesses[8]. These global forces destroy sustainable agricultural production and force people into slums, where access to food is dependent on prices and incomes (ETC Group, 2020).

The number of people working in agriculture worldwide, including forestry and fishing, went down by 17 percentage points in the 2000–2020 period with decline of land and forest area[9]. In Asia and the Pacific region, agricultural employment has declined from approximately 800 million people to roughly 590 million[10]. Most of the South Asian countries (details in Annex 2) also experienced the negative trend of agricultural employment from 1995 to 2016. In addition, the size of smallholder farms has come down noticeably, (less than 2 hectares) in the region during last two decades and many poor rural people in particular, marginal farmers and tenants, Indigenous Peoples, minority castes in this region are either landless or own a limited piece of land or internally displaced (UN-Habitat,2015). It is estimated that 87% of the world's small farms are located here (It depicts that youth are gradually leaving the agriculture sector because of disproportionately high levels of youth underemployment, poverty and rural exodus. The participation of women is constrained as women are deprived of getting equal rights to economic resources, access and control over land and other natural resources and financial services and are overburdened with household chores.

The ecological crisis, including climate change, has affected the agricultural production systems, degraded ecosystems, land, and increased desertification across the regions. It generates further pressures on land, water, and other natural resources, endangers biodiversity, and aggravates current risks associated with livelihoods, human health, infrastructure, and food production systems and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems.[11] Climatic variability is likely to heighten the risks of fires, pest, and pathogen outbreaks negatively affecting food, fibre, and forestry (IPCC, 2019) Furthermore, unsustainable plastic use and its unmanaged waste

8 . During the last two decades global pesticides and fertiliser use increased by 36 % and 46 % respectively. Similarly, over the past 40 years, the world's largest agrochemical firms have used patent laws, mergers & acquisitions and new technologies to take control of the commercial seed sector

9In the last two decades, along with a decline in agriculture employment, agricultural land has declined by 127 million hectares while forest area has declined by 94 million hectares although the global land area equipped for irrigation has increased by 18 percent.

[10]More than one out of every four agricultural workers has left the sector for another job outside agriculture in the region.

11 It is evident that droughts, floods, and heat waves emanating from climate change are likely to pose enormous challenges for the millions of small-scale producers across the globe. The climatic change associated with a water supply and soil moisture, intrusion of salinity in soil could make it less feasible to continue crop production in different regions. It suggests that land-use change and its intensification together with climate variability have elevated both desertification and land degradation that adversely affected existing food security and terrestrial ecosystems

have far-reaching consequences on the agrifood system and human health (The World Bank, 2021).

The digitalization of agriculture without effective inclusion of the small-scale food producers and reduction of the gender gap in access and use of the technology could wipe out indigenous and traditional knowledge of food production. The top-down approach disregards independence and agency of smallholders, fisher folk, rural women and Indigenous Peoples. There is a strong apprehension from CSOs regarding the so-called 'inclusive digitalisation of agriculture', which is simply another way for multinational corporations to maintain and gain further control of agrifood systems where farmers are considered as passive recipients and consumers.

Family-farm-based sustainable Agri food system underpin Right to food

Family farms play a critical and unique role in promoting food sovereignty, eradicating poverty, generating decent work, delivering better management of natural resources and concurrently protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development. Family farmers also play a crucial role in building fairer, more resilient, and sustainable food systems instead of the corporate-led food systems. Family farms and local webs produce approximately 80% of the world's food. It is also reported that farms smaller than 2 hectares produce roughly 35% of the world's food (ETC, 2019).

Agroecology, an ecological concept, is regarded as the solution for encountering the corporate-led agri-food system and promoting small-scale family farming and climate resilient sustainable agriculture. Only 1.5% of land of the total agricultural area of the world is under organic agriculture while in Asia only 0.4% land is covered (FAO 2022).

Agroecology[12] responds to the negative social and ecological impacts of conventional and industrial agriculture that minimizes external inputs and helps foster regenerative ways of producing food with nature (Anderson, 2019). It applies ecological concepts in the sustainable management of agri-food system. FAO has also initiated an initiative titled "Scaling up Agroecology" that contributes to the 2030 agenda and sustainable family farming. It is noted that ten elements of Agroecology developed by FAO are endorsed by all its members to guide relevant actors planning, managing and evaluating for Agroecology transitions.

The Right to Food Bangladesh Network[13] is collaborating with other Civil Society Organizations in the region to organize a two-day event titled 'Asia-Pacific Right to Food and Agrifood system Conference' (APRAC**)** will Convene on 26-27 July in the year of 2023.

Objectives

The prime objective of the conference is to shape existing agri-food systems and its governance to be more equitable, sustainable, climate resilient and promote the right to adequate food for all.

- Analyzing the legal and policy framework for realizing the 'Right to Food';

[12] An ecological concept, encompasses a set of sustainable, equitable principles together with scientific disciplines, policies, and practices, and socio-political movement It advocates for minimizing the social, economic, and geographical distance between producers and consumers through decentralizing cooperation, social capital, and governance and creating closer and far more stable relations between consumers and producers. It might contribute to reducing the use of water and chemicals through water conservation, mulches, compost-based soil quality improvement, and building up nutrients.

13 A network of large number of (more than 1000) CSOs, including farmer's, women's, indigenous and youth organizations, trade unions & individuals

- Strengthening the multistakeholderism to promote 'Right to food' by building partnerships with smallholder family farmers, fisher folks, CSOs, farmers' organizations, youth, women, academia, researchers and policy makers;
- Analysing the social security policy framework and its practices to ensure food security and nutrition of the most marginalized sections of the society;
- Recognizing, protecting and promoting the role, contribution and participation of Indigenous Peoples, smallholder farmers, rural women and local communities in transforming agri-food systems in the Asia Pacific region;
- Analysing agrifood system and its policy frameworks to adopt One Health and agroecological approaches as essential elements of promoting sustainable and equitable systematic approach;
- Raise the voice of the small-scale family farmers (both men and women) on sustainable, equitable and climate-resilient agriculture.

Expected Outputs

- Identifying advocacy actions to promote Right to Food in the region
- Alternative civil society report on 'Right to food perspective' amidst evolving threats and crisis of agrifood system and its governance
- Discussion papers with specific inputs on the thematic agendas.
- Conference Statement. A consensus on a Common Statement to be prepared and presented to the conference.
- Strengthened and improved coordination of CSOs and other relevant stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific region

Mode of conference: A blended (virtual and in-person) conference will be convened.

Thematic conference issues

- Status of Right to Food and Nutrition in Asia and Pacific region
- Legal and policy framework focusing on the RTF
- Social protection programs and food security for the poor and marginalised people
- Transforming agrifood system and its governance for realising the Right to Food
- Impact of Ecological crisis and climate stresses in agrifood system
- Participation of youth and women in agriculture value chain
- Scope and challenges of Agro ecology /permaculture/organic agriculture
- Future trajectory of the Agrifood System and its governance
- Digitalisation of agriculture from the perspective of small-scale food producers and rural women
- Family farming in enshrining sustainable and climate resilient Agrifood system
- The impact of rural landlessness and land tenure insecurity in agrifood system
- Ecosystem-based 'One Health approach' to prevent zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistance
- Status of investment to promote ecological agriculture
- Access to finance and markets for smallholder women and youth farmers

Annex 1: Status of Global Agriculture Production during last two decades

Agricultural Production during last two decades (2000-2019)		
Type of production	**Production in 2019**	**Increase**
Primary crops	9.4 billion tonnes	53%
Meat	337 million tonnes	44%
Fisheries and aquaculture production	178 million tonnes	41%

Annex 2: Employment in agriculture in South Asia (1995-2016)

Sl no	Country	Work force	1995	2005	2016
1	Afghanistan	Total	78.7	71.8	61.3
		Female	88.6	81.4	72.6
2	Bangladesh	Total	66.8	48.1	41.1
		Female	86.0	68.2	62.1
3	Bhutan	Total	91.8	80.3	65.4
		Female	74.3	70.7	56.9
4	India	Total	61.2	56.0	43.4
		Female	74.3	70.7	56.9
5	Maldives	Total	23.0	14.4	7.6
		Female	9.5	8.5	2.5
6	Nepal	Total	81.1	76.0	72.3
		Female	88.8	84.4	83.3
7	Pakistan	Total	46.8	43.1	42.3
		Female	67.5	67.3	73.1
8	Sri Lanka	Total	39.6	33.8	27.5
		Female	42.3	37.8	30.8

Annex 3: Agriculture Input Market monopolization by big corporates at Global level

Seed Sales of the Leading Companies, 2018

Rank	Company	US $ Billion	Market share
1	Bayer Crop Science (includes Monsanto)	9.33	22.4%
2	Corteva Agriscience (USA)	8.00	19.2 %
3	ChemChina /Syngenta	3.00	7.2 %
4	Vilmorin & Cie /Limagrain	1.83	4.4%
5	KWSi(Germany)	4.28	3.0%

Global Agrochemical Sales of the Leading Companies, 2018

Rank	Company	US $ Billion	Market share
1	ChemChina – includes Syngenta and Adama (China)	14.03	24.3%
2	Bayer Crop Science (Germany	9.62	18.4 %
3	BASF (Germany)	6.91	12.0 %
4	Corteva Agriscience (USA)	6.44	11.1%
5	FMC Corporation (USA)	4.28	7.4%

Global Synthetic Fertilizer Sales of the Leading Companies, 2018

Rank	Company	US $ Billion
1	Nutrien Ltd. (Canada)	11.95
2	Yara (Norway)	9.62
3	The Mosaic Company (USA) (includes Mosaic Fertilizer sales, Brazil)	9.00
4	CF Industries Holdings, Inc. (USA)	4.42
5	Israel Chemicals Ltd. (Israel)	4.20