

# Dhaka Declaration on Land and Water Governance in Asia

## WHO WE ARE



Over 65 civil society and land rights activists from six Asian countries, together with representatives of media and the academe from Bangladesh, gathered in Dhaka this 29 to 30 November 2018 at the “Regional Workshop on Land and Water Governance in Asia: Resource Sharing and Cooperation,” organized by ALRD in collaboration with ANGOC. Discussions revolved around emerging issues of land and water governance in Asia in light of large development projects and increasing commercial pressures that compete for land, forests, and water resources on which people’s livelihoods depend.

The workshop also discussed the field report of a civil society mission that examined the socio-economic and environmental impacts to local host communities brought about by cross-border Rohingya influx to Bangladesh.

This important workshop has provided the platform for collective engagement among CSOs, academics, and activists, from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, towards more effective communication of these cross-border issues, and for collective actions to protect people’s rights to land and water resources.

## OUR CALL

Participants in this meeting hereby put forward the following observations and recommendations:

1. We express our deepest concern over the continued violations of human rights, as poor, indigenous, marginalized communities, and religious and ethnic minorities (Haor dwellers), especially women and children, continue to be denied access to land, water, and forests on which their livelihoods, shelter, health and sense of security depend. This is shown in the increasing evictions, displacement, unemployment, and food insecurity across the region – caused by commercial aggression and development projects in the name of growth and industrialization. The weak implementation or absence of pro-people agrarian reforms has further deepened this crisis. Rural women, landless and small-scale farmers, rural youth, and tenants, tea laborers, fisherfolk, migrants, indigenous peoples, dalits and discriminated castes are the most affected. This results in inequitable growth that deepens divide and discrimination.
2. We call on the states to fully ratify and implement UN declarations that safeguard the rights of the women, children, workers, indigenous peoples, Dalits, tea laborers, displaced populations, refugees and the marginalized people with respect to rights to land, forests and water, in relation to livelihood and food sovereignty.
3. Growth and investment must not be achieved at the cost of forcible displacement and encroachment of poor and marginalized people of rural and urban origins. Rather, investment needs to promote social justice and equity.
4. At the same time, international guidelines (such as the VGGT) and principles (UNGP-BHR, rai) should be used to broaden the dialogue and engagement processes at the country level, to elevate the discourse on land governance towards formulation of policies and programs benefitting the marginalized. Meanwhile, we voice our shared concern over the shrinking democratic space which civil society is facing in each country.
5. Transboundary water issues are emerging sources of conflict that directly affect community lives and livelihoods. The unilateral diversion, control, and allocation of water through dams and large-scale projects have exacerbated political, social, and economic tensions with enormous environmental and ecological impacts on millions of people that depend on water. We call for a negotiated settlement based on dialogues, where the voices of affected people are heard and addressed, and principles of international law are respected.
6. We call on governments to take effective steps to stop all forms of land-grabbing. We denounce cases of land-grabbing where government plays a broker role in land acquisitions and concessions, with no transparency, no independent Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA), and without the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of communities.
7. In the context of the growing role of women in agriculture and food security, there should be formal recognition of women as farmers, with equal status to land in inheritance, land access and allocation, support services, participation in land

and resource governance, and effective control over resources. There is a need for enabling women to raise their voice and be active in independent decision-making processes from grassroots to policy level.



8. Governments should legally recognize the traditional ownership, customary rights, and community ownership of indigenous peoples over land. We reaffirm our commitment to stand by indigenous peoples in their struggles to safeguard their rights and interests. We call upon governments to protect indigenous communities against continuous encroachment of their lands and resources by State and commercial interests.
9. The cultural and livelihood rights of forest people should be recognized and respected in laws, policies, and programs regarding forests.
10. We urge the full and effective implementation of pro-poor agrarian reforms that secure land rights for smallholders, tenants, landless and marginal farmers, indigenous peoples, agricultural laborers, and rural women.
11. Rohingyas are evicted from Myanmar amidst reports of massive Chinese and Indian investments in the Rakhine State. Meanwhile, Rohingya refugees face potential conflicts with host communities while common resources are being depleted. We demand the safe and dignified repatriation of the Rohingya people to their homeland. We call upon the international community to exert effective pressure on the government of Myanmar to stop persecution and to respect the citizenship rights of Rohingya people.

#### **OUR SHARED COMMITMENT**

We echo the call of the Sustainable Development Goals that no one should be left behind. We will continue to raise the issues and concerns regarding the Rohingya people in our respective countries and in regional and international forums, towards a lasting solution to the conflict. All the participating organizations and civil society delegates commit to uphold the Dhaka Declaration on Land and Water Governance in Asia to frame country specific actions and keep each other informed and engaged across Asia to put people first in land and agrarian reforms.

**Adopted this 30th of November 2018, in Dhaka, Bangladesh.**

ACDF, ActonAid, Bangladesh, ARBAN, ASOD, Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Bejoyee Nari O Sheshu Unnyan Shangstha, BELA, BFF, BNKS, Caritas Bangladesh, CCDB, DUS, HDRC, HEAD, IDEA, INCIDIN Bangladesh, Kapaeeng Foundation (KF), Karmojibi Nari, LRC, Nagorik Uddyog (NU), NDF, Nijera Kori, Poribesh O Haor Unnyan Sangstha, PROCHESTA, RULFAO, RUN, SAMS, Speed Trust, Transparency International Bangladesh and UDPS

Asian NGOs Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), Community Self-reliance Centre (CSRC), Nepal, Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE), India, International Land Coalition (ILC), Asia, Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA), Indonesia and STAR Kampuchea, Cambodia