

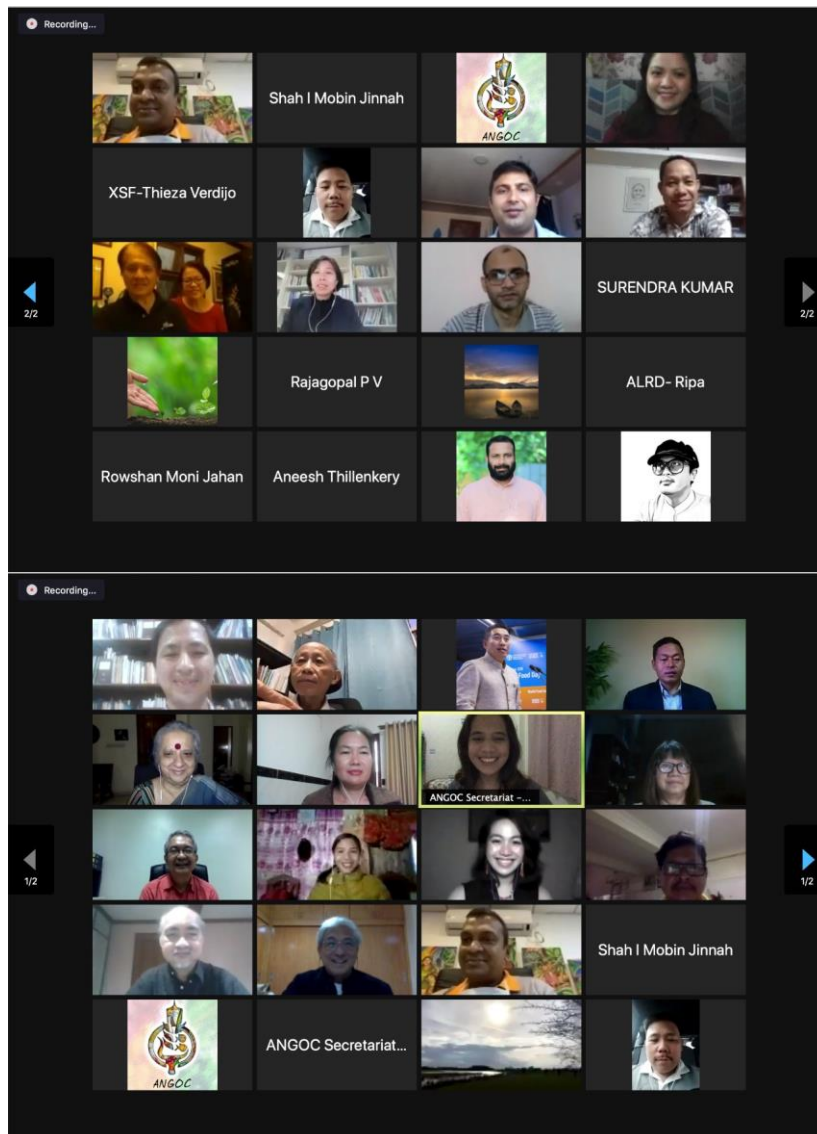
OUR FyouthTURE:

Protecting Land Rights and Ensuring Food Security in Asia Post-COVID-19

ANGOC Network ZOOM Conference and Celebration of the 2020 World Food Day

15 October 2020, Thursday
1:30 PM (Bangalore, Colombo, Delhi)
1:45 PM (Kathmandu)
2:00 PM (Dhaka)
3:00 PM (Jakarta, Phnom Penh)
4:00 PM (Beijing, Manila)

Summary Report



Introduction

Since 1981, the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) network has been commemorating World Food Day (WFD) on October 16th by conducting public events and producing information materials to foster public awareness and actions to address the challenge of eliminating hunger and poverty.

For 2020, we will celebrate WFD amidst a global COVID-19 pandemic which now threatens the health status and food security of individuals, families and communities worldwide. Poor and disadvantaged sectors – including small farmers, rural artisans, indigenous peoples, poor urban dwellers and women – have been hit hardest by the pandemic and remain the most vulnerable.

The current crisis prompted the ANGOC network to reflect and formulate the **Statement on Protecting Land Rights and Ensuring Food Security in the Time of COVID-19** (see <https://angoc.org/news/angoc-statement-on-protecting-land-rights-and-ensuring-food-security-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>). The Network calls for a fundamental restructuring of our food system – towards strengthening local food systems, providing real support for small farmers and producers, building equitable access and control of land and resources, and ensuring sustainable management of resources.

WFD Theme for 2020: *Grow, nourish, sustain. Together.*

“As countries around the world suffer the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, #WorldFoodDay is launching a call for global solidarity to help the most vulnerable people to recover and make food systems more sustainable, stronger and resilient to shocks.”

The above theme reinforces with the calls of the said ANGOC Statement. Hence, it is an opportune time for the ANGOC Network to reflect on how the calls for action of the statement can be translated into the work and linkages of the members and the coalition as a whole.

Objective of Online Conference

The ANGOC network organized this online conference (through Zoom) to discuss the implications of the issues and recommendations raised in the ANGOC statement to the work of civil society in Asia in the context of COVID-19’s “new normal” and beyond. The said statement was translated to Bahasa, Bengali, Hindi, Mandarin, Nepali, Sinhala, and Tamil. A total of 38 representatives (13 females, 25 males) from 12 ANGOC member-organizations as well as the Chairperson of the Committee of World Food Summit (CFS) joined in this event.



Prior to the formal opening of the event, the ANGOC Network remembered and prayed for GN Reddi (South Asia Rural Reconstruction Association) and PM Tripathi (Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development). Welcoming the members and partners in this event, ANGOC Chairperson Chet Charya (STAR Kampuchea) reiterated the importance of reflecting on the effects of the pandemic on food security, as well as to how the youth can be engaged to become advocates for ZERO Hunger. Charya noted that the discussions will serve as inputs to the formulation of the next ANGOC Strategic Action Plan (ASAP). For his part, ANGOC Vice-Chair for South Asia Jitram Lama (NGO Federation of Nepal) thanked the resource

persons for providing the broader context of rural development as well as echoing how the ANGOC statement resonates with ground realities.

Key messages

In relation to ANGOC Statement on Protecting Land Rights and Ensuring Food Security amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many of our underlying fragilities and risks as a people – a heartless economy with widening inequities, destruction of our environment, unjust distribution of land and natural resources for shelter and livelihood, growing pollution and congested cities, the lack of basic access to food and nutrition, and the absence of universal health care, all amidst our planet’s growing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. This prompted the ANGOC Network to issue such *Statement*, calling for immediate actions from the global community, national governments, and civil society in resolving the systemic inequities that render people susceptible to the effects of the global pandemic. Members demanded for a restructuring of the food system, asserting that secure land rights for all will be integral to achieving food security in a post-COVID-19 world. See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kz1gMZTFj73lcswT9YefEJWQxZGT2oHh/view>

Kushi Kabir (Chairperson of ALRD and Grassroots Woman Leader)

- Event is timely given the pandemic, as well as 15th October is International Rural Women’s Day
- Stressed on **women's rights and empowerment**
 - Recognition of their work, so they can earn respect
 - Women as producers continue to feed their families and work in their fields too.



However, they are vulnerable and more marginalized as in most cases, they are not being paid. In this pandemic, they are the first to lose their jobs.

- Global statistics have also recorded increased records on violence against women during this pandemic
- Remarked that the ANGOC is comprehensive and touched on the issues on the ground. Agreed with theme of the statement of “Food and Freedom, Jobs and Justice, Land and Labor, Peace and Prosperity.” Kushi added another slogan of “respect for people” given the increased violations of human rights and shrinking civic space.



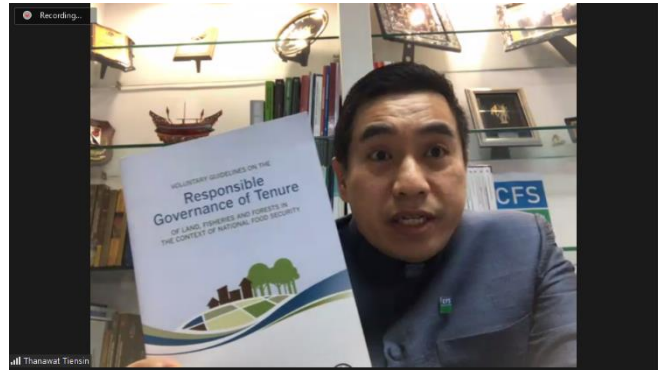
**Archbishop Antonio “Tony” Ledesma, SJ
(founder of ANGOC, former ANGOC
Chairperson)**

- Reminded the members of the origins of ANGOC, which was founded 31 years ago in 1979, in the framework of and 5 months preceding the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD). The overall theme of the Statement -- food, jobs, freedom, land and labor, peace and justice – is more relevant as ever as the 350 million rural poor in the 1970s have doubled despite advances in technology.

- In the first week of October 2020, Pope Francis issued an encyclical “Brothers All” calling for inclusive development and that we should work as one family, working on one world, and taking care of our world. Solidarity is essential in caring for the “neighbor” in need. We should see ourselves in inclusive development in terms of solidarity with others and our local communities.
- The ANGOC Network should proactively help them vis-a-vis the worsening plight of rural and urban poor in the light of pandemic. ANGOC needs to be involved in protecting domestic human rights (in terms of domestic violence and protection of minorities).
- Another point of the ANGOC Statement that struck him was the need to provide natural and local inputs for the agriculture of rural households. He cited as an example the Ganda natural farming - a form of natural farming used in southern Philippines that can help many of the rural poor. This affordable technology uses native earthworm as organic fertilizer with a mixture of sea salt and water.
- Archbishop Tony encouraged everyone to promote vegetable gardening for many rural households as well as urban gardening. Families who have adopted these have increased their food security. This is a strategy for reducing food kilometers.

Thanawat Tiensin (Chair of Committee on World Food Security/CFS)

- CFS as global multi-stakeholder platform (governments, CSOs, private sector and research institutions) agreed on the ANGOC Statement as the food systems are challenged in this pandemic as the environment continuously has deteriorated.
- Given that food issues have a lot of complexities, CFS needs the support of CSOs, farmers organizations, producers to transform food systems into being more sustainable and resilient.
- The challenge for CFS is how to bring policies into action at the ground level.
- Encouraged ANGOC to engage and support the work of the CFS, in particular to the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit.



In relation to initiatives of ANGOC Members in Mitigating the Impact of the Pandemic

Despite of the protocols imposed by governments to stem the tide of the pandemic, several ANGOC members have been contributing to mitigate its impact of their partner communities. The ANGOC Regional Secretariat thus prepared a video to document such initiatives (see https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pFibltT5hQExAufiO2m_yzk7m9LhYhbY/view).

In the absence of government or humanitarian support, communities and CSOs have played critical role during this crisis. Asian CSOs, including the ANGOC Network members have been actively calling on their countries' governments to address the crisis through mass testing, support for the public health sector, and aid for poor and vulnerable populations. But they were also very much involved in directly providing aid to constituent communities.

Donation drives abound. Apart from cash, members such as STAR Kampuchea, Ekta Parishad, and SARVODAYA provided food, water, sanitation materials, seeds, and agricultural support to its partner communities.

Noting the difficulties of producers, CSOs also helped sell agricultural produce and helped deliver them from rural areas to cities, through online markets on social media pages, mobile apps, and partnerships with distributors. In India, Ekta Parishad also initiated livelihood projects in villages to enable communities to cope with the economic difficulties brought on by the pandemic.

In Indonesia, Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA), partnered with labor unions to provide food directly sourced from farmers, to laborers impacted by unemployment as many factories close down. KPA also organizes food exchange mechanisms between fisherfolk and farmers affected by the crisis. In Nepal, staff of the Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC) contributed Rs. 260,457 (approximately US\$ 2,265) for the food needs of their partner communities. They also provided health and sanitation materials.

Many CSOs advocating for land rights, also became information hubs on health and COVID-19. Organizations released pamphlets, infographics, and videos disseminated through online platforms on

how COVID spreads, prevention measures, COVID-19 symptoms, and measures to undertake in cases of infection or health emergencies. In Bangladesh, the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) also distributed IEC video materials which were shown on television.

In Sri Lanka, SARVODAYA mobilized the technological know-how of the youth to launch online IECs tackling COVID, as well as materials intended to counter the new strands of hate speech, stigma, and discrimination pointed against certain groups in light of the emergence of the virus.

Some of ANGO members, partners and the ANGO Regional Secretariat have started documenting the effects of the pandemic on local farmers, indigenous, and fisherfolk communities, highlighting their needs and providing policy analyses and recommendations for government to respond to such needs. It is through these documentation efforts that we are able to understand how tenure insecurity affects food security and adaptive capacity during crises like pandemics; how the lack of strong, localized food systems leave communities vulnerable to hunger during global economic shocks; how control over forests must be provided to indigenous groups because it is through traditional conservation practices that we may prevent the emergence of new zoonotic diseases; among many other things.

At the same time, CSOs pursued monitoring, campaigns, and advocacy work. For instance, the NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN) are directly involved in the monitoring and refinement of government efforts to respond to this crisis.

Though the roundtable discussions and workshops that explore the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable groups, and that into account how societal factors and inequality of access and control over resources contributed to the emergence of the pandemic, CSOs have been working through recommendations to ensure that the devastation from this pandemic will never be seen again, come another global crisis. For example, the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA), apart from conducting its own relief efforts, organized an online forum on *The Importance of Land Use in the Time of a Pandemic*.

Despite the immediate threats to global health, many threats to human rights also emerged as democratic space continued to shrink. Civil society continued to push back against this, despite the limitations. Many countries in Asia resorted to using military and police strength to enforce its COVID-response programs. Many civil society workers and activists, while delivering relief goods or engaging in peaceful, socially-distant protests, have been arrested for “violating quarantine protocols” or other trumped-up charges. In the Philippines, early findings from an ongoing land conflict monitoring report conducted by the ANGO Regional Secretariat in partnership with other CSOs suggest that violence against rights defenders spiked during the height of lockdowns. Meanwhile, impunity reigns as top government and military leaders seen to violate quarantine protocols, barely even get a slap on the wrist.

In relation to changes needed to institute in our work and establish linkages at national and regional levels

ANGOC Members¹ shared their reflections on what their respective institutions as well as the network should focus in the wake of the pandemic, building on the ANGOC Statement.

Bangladesh (Association for Land Reform and Development)

ANGOC should continue to work towards broadening the democratic space for CSOs and movement who are working on land and human rights, given the shrinking space. Members and the ANGOC Network should link more other rights activists and groups. The next strategy could outline specific plans and targets at the country level. Members can share their respective strategic plans to the ANGOC Regional Secretariat as a starting point.



Cambodia (STAR Kampuchea)

Working on fishery, forestry, and good governance, it is important to raise the voices of the poor and to ensure that the support of the local governments is reaching the rural poor.

With the pandemic, reverse-migration is happening as people returning to countryside found themselves with no land to cultivate or no capacity to do so. Thus, capacity building and skills enhancing such as in land use planning and using online platforms can be an opportunity for CSOs. Of special focus is the youth, as we need to build the next generation of leaders.

China (China Association for NGO Cooperation)

This year 2020 marks the final year of the country's anti-poverty drive (initiated in 2012) of ending domestic poverty before 2021, 100 years of the founding anniversary of the Communist Party of China. Thus, regional cooperation should be explored with the Network, possibly on providing e-commerce platform and building capacities of CSOs to provide professional service to farmers.



¹ Due to technical difficulties (i.e., poor internet connection), some of the members were not able to share their reflections.

India (Ekta Parishad)



We can start documenting success stories on land reform to strengthen our advocacy. As an example, farmers who got land in a village near Gwalior contributed 1,000 kilograms of wheat for relief work to nearby communities who are experiencing food insecurity. Such stories can help governments to appreciate the benefit that one can derive out of land reform. Also, ANGOC should articulate various components that can create self-sustained, self-governed village system.

At the same time, the young peoples who were less interested in agriculture and were happy with their city life had a shock of their life during the lockdown. Now they are back to their village with a completely shattered dream of the city life. This is the time to mobilize this work force around the issue of land and labor. This presents an opportunity to build a large nonviolent movement by involving these young people to demand a radical land reform.

ANGOC should strategically expanding the network of in Asia given the complexity of the problem.

As conflict is increasing, how do we help our partners to deepen their understanding on nonviolence and nonviolent struggles? As we know the State is going to be more and more intolerant and oppressive? Our partners need to develop better methods for struggle.

Nepal (NGO Federation of Nepal)

NFN supports the call for debt cancellation and building capacities of farmers, particularly the young farmers, on the field of social entrepreneur. The promotion of organic farming should be pursued by ANGOC, as the issue of the environmental and health issues continue to worsen as a result of the use of fertilizers in the countryside continue to be used in a massive scale. Education is likewise key given the high illiteracy among children of farmers.





Philippines (Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas)

PhilDHRRA has been working on the themes of agrarian reform and rural development. While the network has been lobbying on such issues, agrarian reform is far from completion as agricultural lands are converted to plantations and mining has been extended to ancestral domains of indigenous peoples.

The ANGOC Network should promote household food security, and support participatory land use planning.

Sri Lanka (SARVODAYA Shramadana Movement)

Currently providing relief assistance to Covid-affected communities, a key element is how to increase the resiliency of communities from various threats, including climate change. A strategy used by SARVODAYA is to link them to government offices, at national and local levels. With the digital divide more evidently felt in the rural areas, CSOs should find ways of how to bridge the gap. Grassroots education will be a huge challenge in the face of the restrictions (of mobility and face-to-face gatherings) due to the pandemic.



The shrinking democratic space of civil society should likewise be included in the advocacy of the ANGOC Network.

In relation to engaging the youth

ANGOC invited two youth representatives to share their insights on how CSOs can engage them, and sustain such engagement in CSO work, much more in the area of land rights.

Xyla “Tat” Gualberto (Xavier Science Foundation, Inc. - Philippines)

One of the new initiatives that ANGOC can explore at the national and regional level in the light of this pandemic, is engaging the youth in the work of CSOs. As such, CSOs could explore diving into a radical inclusion of the youth, in issues that were once labelled as serious matters, i.e., matters that were better left to be discussed and confronted by the older generation. These include discussions on resource governance, women and youth empowerment, indigenous peoples’ welfare, land tenure, deforestation and pandemics among others. In fact, there is so much young people can do and tangibly contribute to these areas.

Young people have the skill, and access to innovative information platforms using modern technology.

They are also "in" this interesting period of modern learning where up-to-date knowledge is readily available. If the youth can be shown that such knowledge can be translated to projects or grassroots initiatives, it will empower and inspire them to learn more, to work more and help more. With the youth's undeniable enthusiasm and wide network facilitated by social media, sustainable inclusive change can be achieved.

Furthermore, CSOs can model the possibility of strong and effective collaboration that can be solutions for decade-long problems. There are so many experts on technical and social science. But not much experts on practicing COLLABORATION and facilitating CONNECTIVITY. CSOs can also emphasize to the youth the need to facilitate connectivity. There is so much potential, and power when these expertise are wielded together. The young people have to be made to see, the need to bring people to work together- within the community, the community and the different sectors.

Mohsin Khan (Ekta Parishad - India)

CSOs can create spaces fwhere young people can showcase skills and leadership, and have opportunity to fail, learn, and come up with ideas. With responsibility, youth should be given leeway to experiment and welcome the experience to fail, as failure is a form of learning.



As the age gap widens, inter-generational connection is much needed. It is important that the youth receive guidance and inspiration from elders. Opportunities should be given to bring the youth in the frontline, which is necessary to assume leadership.

Summary and Next Steps

ANGOC Chair Emeritus Fr. Francis Lucas presented his summary of the sharing of the members in terms of: a) thematic areas for engagement, and b) strategic linkages.

Thematic areas for engagement:

- join lobby for debt cancellation of third world countries;
- document and disseminate good experiences/cases of land and agrarian reform;
- women's rights and empowerment;
- engaging in inclusive development in terms of solidarity in our society and local community (e.g. use of local inputs [e.g. organic local fertilizers]; engaging in inclusive business; rural and urban gardening);



- making food systems resilient by bringing producers closer to the consumers;
- promoting agroecological innovations;
- land use planning; and,
- support for rural communities through capacity building to make them resilient (i.e., social entrepreneur); addressing illiteracy in rural areas; ensuring the support of the local governments are reaching the rural poor; and, providing skills for returning migrant workers.

Strategic linkages that ANGOC should pursue:

- Linking with other rights activists and groups
- Urban CSOs and groups
- youth mobilization for agriculture

Fr. Francis then challenged the members of transforming the ANGOC as a digital knowledge platform. He mentioned how applications and websites like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube are immensely popular and accessible, especially among the youth. These platforms captivate the attention of people. Hence, the network should also continue looking into how tapping into these newer platforms to get our messages across to a wider audience. This would involve overcoming challenges such as creating watchable content, using language that would be easy to understand.

In closing, on behalf of the ANGOC Regional Secretariat, Nathaniel Don Marquez thanked the members and speakers for their active participation. Members were encouraged to submit written submissions of their reflections. The videos presented during the event were immediately uploaded to the ANGOC website after the event. □