

# When agricultural land is plundered for investments: A sectoral study on land grabbing in Bangladesh

Community Development Association

## INTRODUCTION

*“Land grabbing can be defined as control whether through ownership, lease, concession, contracts, quotas, or private of larger than locally–typical amounts of land by any persons or entities - public or private, foreign or domestic - via any means- ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’ – for purposes of speculation, extraction, environmental destruction, commercial resource control or commodification at the cost of peasant farmers, women, IPs and minorities, agroecology, land stewardship, food sovereignty and human rights, including invasion and expansion of highly unchallenged political biotechnology.” (Eco Ruralis)*

### **Context of the study**

Land grabbing is one of the major problems in Asia including Bangladesh, affecting the lives, livelihoods and rights of people. Based on any criteria, land grabbing is generally illegal, unethical, and immoral.

Bangladesh is one of the world’s most densely populated countries, and it continues to rapidly lose its agricultural land due to unplanned industrialization and rapid encroachment of human habitation on local farming areas.

Every year, 8,000 hectares of agricultural land are lost from the original 13 million hectares of cropland because of urbanization, industrialization, unplanned rural housing, and infrastructure development (Khan, 2019).

Today, the country’s fast-growing population is looking for new land to build homes while the entrepreneurs are moving to remote areas in the countryside to set up industries and factories.

As a result, the share of agriculture in the gross domestic product (GDP) has been declining over the last decade. The agricultural sector accounted for 20.80 percent of total GDP in 2000. By 2019, it was down to 13.35 percent (BBS, 2020). If



**Table 1. Names and locations of EPZs**

Name of the EPZ	Location
Chattogram Export Processing Zone	South Hallishahar, Chattogram
Dhaka Export Processing Zone	Savar, Dhaka City
Adamjee Export Processing Zone	Siddhirganj, Narayanganj
Cumilla Export Processing Zone	Ola Airport area Cumilla
Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone	North Patenga Chattogram
Ishwardi Export Processing Zone	Pakshey, Pabna
Mongla Export Processing Zone	Mongla Port Area, Bagerhat
Uttara Export Processing Zone	Shangalshi, Nilphamari
Korean Export Processing Zone (Private)	Opposite to the Chittagong International Airport, Chattogram
Rangunia Export processing Zone(Private)	Rangunia, Chattogram

Source: BEPZA Brochure, 2019

the trend is not reversed soon, the country will permanently lose its food security.

Posing a significant threat to food security are Export Processing Zones, which are being set up in the name of economic development.

According to World Bank (1992) and UNIDO (1995), an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) “is an industrial area that constitutes an enclave with regard to customs’ tariffs and the commercial code in force in the host country” (Aggarwal, 2005).

There are 10 EPZs in the country, of which eight are owned by the Government of Bangladesh. The first EPZ, Chattogram EPZ, was established in 1983. Since then, nine EPZs were established all over Bangladesh. The government announced in 2016 that in the next 15 years, 100 new EPZs and SEZs will be established under the government’s Industrial Policy of 2016.

Bangladesh established in 1980 the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) that oversees the operations of eight EPZs. On the other hand, the Board of Governors of the

Bangladesh Private Export Processing Zone (BPEPZ) monitors the private EPZs.

According to the website of the National Board of Revenue, EPZ, a company is allowed to import machinery, equipment, and raw-materials for the manufacture of export goods without tariff. Investors in these zones are granted perks such as a 10-year tax holiday, exemption from dividend tax, and accelerated depreciation on the machinery or plant.

The Bangladesh government has itself been securing most of the agricultural land, both State-owned and private, in favor of EPZs. It believes that these zones will lead to fast economic growth, more foreign exchange, employment opportunities and the chance to compete in the global free trade economy.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study was undertaken to:

- describe and discuss the process (stakeholders, forms of control process, drivers), and impacts of land grabbing in EPZs;

- describe and identify issues and challenges presented by State policies and mechanisms on EPZs; and,
- Formulate recommendations to protect and uphold the tenure rights of individuals and communities affected by EPZs.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Primary data were collected through online in-depth analytical discussions among the CSOs and land defenders from the grassroots while secondary data were gathered from various sources such as research articles, official documents, national and international journals, working papers, newspapers, online publications, and related books as well as stakeholders' information.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This study focused on the grabbing of agricultural land for the establishment of EPZs all over Bangladesh.

The researchers wanted to collect more primary data but movement restrictions due to COVID-19 prevented face-to-face discussion and dialogue that would have enriched this study. Adding to the constraints are irregular electricity supply and unreliable or weak internet connection that likewise made data gathering challenging.

## **SECTORAL OVERVIEW**

### **Description of the sector**

Bangladesh is the least developed country in South Asia with its economy heavily dependent on agriculture, therefore on land.

There are interests competing over the land, however, as Bangladesh also has to find land to house its huge population and land for industries and infrastructure development as well as tourism.

Encroachment on agriculture land is a particularly pressing problem in rapidly growing areas, one of the reasons why cultivable land has been reduced from 9.72 million hectares (1991) to 8.52 million hectares (2011).

This is alarming for an overpopulated country like Bangladesh. The threat to the country's food security grows as land and soil resources are degraded and cultivated areas are further reduced to make way, for example, to EPZs.

EPZs or industrial parks are being developed to respond to international market demand for cheaper goods.

*“The manifest objectives of EPZs are to attract foreign capital investment and mobilize investment for capital formation for rapid industrialization, to create employment opportunities for the country's manpower, to induce transfer of technology, and to earn foreign exchange by boosting exports. Formation of EPZs in Bangladesh also addresses problems like growing trade gap, high unemployment, and dearth of capital investment, shortage of foreign currency and lack of technical know-how” (Hasan and Ali Md, 2019).*

The government supports these investors with big facilities including land to ensure smooth manufacturing and financial operations. It also extends other benefits such as loans.

The majority of the EPZs are State-owned while the two private EPZs are the Korean EPZ (KEPZ) established by Youngone Corporation, and the



Rangunia EPZ put up by Chittagong Industrial Park Limited, a local company.

### **Significance of the sector**

Bangladesh’s total land area is about 14.8 million hectares, of which net crop land accounts for 7.8 million hectares (59 percent). Out of this, 24 percent is not available for cultivation while 17 percent is forest area.

Bangladesh has about 160 million people today and by 2050, this is expected to reach 250 million. With such a huge population, there will be increased pressure to cultivate land to feed the people. Agriculture indeed plays a major role in the livelihood of rural households, in securing national food self-sufficiency and in the country’s overall economic development. (Hossain, Bayes, and Islam, 2018).

However, over the past 30 to 40 years, agriculture land has been declining at one percent a year, which means that over that time, at least a quarter of the country’s agricultural land has already been lost to non-agriculture uses including EPZs.

Bangladesh is losing around 79,000 hectares of fertile agricultural land every year due to urbanization, building of new infrastructure such as roads, and implementation of other development projects (Hossain, Bayes, and Islam, 2018).

And even more land may be lost to EPZs given the government’s announced plans to establish more EPZs in the name of faster economic growth, thus threatening the country’s food security.

It is difficult to assess the actual situation of the status of human rights, particularly workers of factories within the EPZs, as information on working conditions and rights is not readily available.

**Table 2. Land area covered by EPZs**

<b>Name of the EPZ</b>	<b>Area Quantity in acres (hectares)</b>
Chittagong EPZ	453.00 (183.33)
Dhaka EPZ	361.22 (146.19)
Adamjee EPZ	345.12 (139.67)
Comilla EPZ	267.46 (108.24)
Karnafuli EPZ	209.06 (84.61)
Ishwardi EPZ	308.97 (125.04)
Mongla EPZ	289.42 (117.12)
Uttara EPZ	212.00 (85.79)
Korean EPZ	2,500.00 (1,011.72)
Rangunia EPZ	171.00 (69.20)
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,117.25 (2,070.91)</b>

**Source:** BEPZA Brochure, 2019

More than 30 countries including South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands, Switzerland, India, and Pakistan have so far invested in different projects in the EPZs in Bangladesh.

Ready-made garments manufacturing accounts for the bulk of the production centers in the country’s EPZs (119 out of 476 total products). These are followed by products manufacturing-garments accessories (93); knitwear (32); footwear and leather products (32); electric and electronic goods (19); plastic goods (14); and, metal products (12). Other goods produced in EPZs are caps, tents, packaging goods and rope.

About 58 percent of the investments in the government-run EPZs come from outside Bangladesh, while 28 percent are local and 14 percent came from joint ventures between local and foreign companies.



### **Scope of land grabbing**

In Bangladesh, some 5117.25 acres (approximately 2,070.91 hectares) of land are owned by the government to establish State-run EPZs.

And it is not just the land that could have gone to crop production to feed the people that has been sacrificed. Natural water bodies such as lakes and canals are being destroyed to give way to the building of commercial establishments all over the country. Environmental degradation and carbon emissions have increased and many of the youth have shifted away from the farm.

### **Trends in the sector**

The government has committed to develop more infrastructure, including EPZs and SEZs, all over Bangladesh to spur faster economic growth.

However, the price the government is willing to pay may be too steep as it is neglecting other needs, such as maintaining environmental biodiversity, and agricultural productivity. The investors also cannot be relied upon to protect the environment and agricultural production as they have other priorities.

Thus, rampant lowland conversion has a direct adverse impact on the environment and livelihood of those in suburban areas.

### **Entities involved in land grabbing**

EPZs are set up by the BEPZA, which has a Board of Governors led by the Prime Minister.

Where and how the EPZ will be set up – from land acquisition to structural development – all take place under the direct supervision and management of BEPZA, which is under the direct

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supervision of the Prime Minister. BEPZA sets all the policies and enforces the law.

### **Forms of Control**

When the government through BEPZA decides to secure agricultural lands for conversion into EPZs, the community has little option but to give in. There is no specific information available on the matter, but observations indicate that the government does seize land for this purpose and hardly any compensation is given. The government of Bangladesh prefers to call this process *land acquisition with free, prior, and informed consent*, and not land grabbing.

But it can indeed be called land grabbing because when a place is identified for use as an EPZ, no discussion is held with the people in the area. The government does not even bother to secure an environmental exemption, and it does not make an honest environmental impact assessment of the conversion of agriculture land into EPZs.

The government just goes ahead and decides on the use of the land without looking more closely at the advantages and disadvantages of using the land for agriculture. When the land is secured, the government merely assures the people of rapid economic growth and that they will have jobs. Often, this turns out to be a false assurance, an empty promise.

Because more land is being converted for industrial use, the agriculture-based economic structure of Bangladesh is weakening. Thus, even though



**Table 3. Roles and brief assessment of institutions engaged in investments**

Institution	Authority	Assessment
BEPZA	Authority of EPZs, selection of place, policy formulation, and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No interest to reform existing laws</li> </ul>
Ministry of Land	Land acquisition, land registration, policy, and legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No updated database, no specific information on <i>khas</i> land, agricultural land</li> <li>Even what amount of land has been acquired, the amount of land grabbed is unknown</li> </ul>
Ministry of Industries	Policy formulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Just thinking about economic growth, the tendency is to stay away from agriculture and farmers</li> </ul>
Ministry of Finance	Ensuring financial facilities, provide bank loans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Caters only to powerful people</li> </ul>
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs	Policy formulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not active enough in finding weaknesses in the laws and reasons for land grabbing;</li> <li>Lack of enforcement of existing laws</li> </ul>
Government management bodies	Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to legislate on specific issues</li> </ul>
More powerful people of the society	Yield influence to government bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use influence to capture all the facilities legally and illegally;</li> <li>Assist local administration to forcibly evict community people from the land</li> </ul>
Ministry of Agriculture	Policy on agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unable to protect agricultural land;</li> <li>Activities are not visible; there is no clear national food security and agriculture policy;</li> <li>Not identifying the source of agricultural land properly</li> </ul>
Ministry of Planning	Policy direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of skills and long-term planning;</li> <li>Lack of foresight in decision making</li> </ul>
Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripokkha (RAJUK)	Initiating and implementing of Dhaka metropolitan city's development plans. RAJUK is directed by a board which consist of chairman and not more than five members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corrupted organizations approve any file in exchange for money;</li> <li>Lack of monitoring and evaluation;</li> <li>Builds infrastructure in the name of development</li> </ul>
Bangladesh Forestry and Environmental Board	Environmental Impact Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EIA is not followed properly;</li> <li>Gives legitimacy to organizations that harm the environment</li> </ul>
Local Government Rural Development (LGRD)	Decides on infrastructure projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of transparency, lack of responsibility</li> </ul>
Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB)	It arranges housing fair among the developers, financial institutions and building material providers. The objectives of REHAB is to promote development projects in housing sector (private & national).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignorance about infrastructure and weak planning</li> </ul>



### Box 1: Farmers might lose their livelihood to make way for the establishment of a Special Economic Zone in the Chandpur tea estate

More than 1,200 families (6,000 persons) of the Chandpur tea estate (Deorgachh, Chunarughat Upazila, Habiganj, Sylhet Division, Bangladesh) may lose their farmlands and be displaced by the establishment of a proposed Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Workers of the tea estate, run by Duncan Brothers Bangladesh Ltd., have been farming in the area since 1890. In 2015, the Government of Bangladesh cancelled the Duncan Brother's lease and acquired 512 acres (207 hectares) for an SEZ.

Upon finding out about the planned SEZ, tea workers, started protesting the establishment of the SEZ. Farmers began to guard their ricelands and conducted demonstrations, yet the plans of the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) remain unswayed.

The concern of the tea workers is also an issue of insecure land tenure. These workers, who belong to various tribes, do not have any legal entitlements to the land, despite their groups having occupied the tea estate for hundreds of years. The tea workers are descendants of bonded laborers brought in by the British from various parts of the Indian subcontinent to work on the tea estate some 200 years ago. According to Jotirmoy Barua, coordinator of Life and Nature Safeguard Platform (LNSP), the Bangladesh government must recognize the rights of tea workers to the land, since the country has ratified the International Labor Organization Convention 107. Article 11 of the Convention calls for recognition of ownership rights to lands that are traditionally occupied by tribals. At present however, Bangladesh has not enacted any law in line with the convention.

Further, Jotirmoy states that the BEZA is violating Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's stance on not allowing the establishment of industries on arable land.

Begum Khan tea garden Panchayat Committee President Chandra Karmakar however mentioned that in the requisition document, the district administration had already classified the 512 acres as "barren land" despite the presence of workers growing crops in the area for over a century.

Moreover, activists fear that the proposed Chandpur tea estate SEZ may lead to adverse environmental impacts, being only four kilometers away from the Satchhari National Forest, and 19 kilometers away from the Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary.

A Right to Information (RTI) request in 2019 revealed that the BEZA has not yet conducted any feasibility study or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the establishment of an SEZ in Chandpur tea estate.

**Source:** Deshwara, M. (2019, December 23). Special Economic Zone in Tea Estate: 6,000 to lose means for survival. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/tea-workers-lose-jobs-proposed-special-economic-zone-1843876>

temporary economic development has taken place as a result of unplanned industrialization, sustainable development is not happening.

#### **Purposes**

The main purpose of the BEPZA is to entice foreign investments, for which liberal facilities and incentives are offered. In exchange, these investors are expected to promote exports,

provide jobs, upgrade technology, and raise the skill level of the workers.

Knowing that the Bangladesh government is keen on developing more EPZs, private developers have been buying cheap agricultural land and land in flood zones in anticipation of the building of commercial establishments. They are also enticed by the lack of land ceiling provisions and price control mechanisms.



### ***Families and communities affected***

Disproportionately affected by the government's policy of aggressively developing EPZs are the poor and indigenous people who stand to lose their livelihood due to displacement from the land they depend on. Their food security is likewise gravely threatened as without the land, they will have to buy food and prices constantly increase.

And even if the EPZs are developed just outside their communities, they are still adversely affected as the EPZs have been found to reduce soil fertility and productivity, water supply and the biodiversity of the environment.

Also, since many of the workers of EPZs come from far away, there is pressure to provide housing facilities and that means a further reduction in agriculture land.

In places, where an EPZ has been established, residents had to move to other places. Some had to give up their homes and agricultural land, especially for Uttora EPZ.

The Bangladesh government has no inventory of the land it has so far "acquired" from the communities. Neither does it have data on the number of people who have been displaced and the communities affected by land grabbing for EPZs.

### **CASE STUDY: DHAKA EPZ**

The Dhaka EPZ was established in 1993. There are about 105 investors here, of which only 24 are Bangladeshi. It is located at Ganakbari, Savar, Dhaka, 35 kilometers from Dhaka City Centre, 25 kilometers from Hazrat Shahjalal (R) Airport and 304 kilometers from Chattogram Sea Port.

### ***Environmental Pollution around Dhaka EPZ and its impact on surface and ground water***

Since its establishment, the Dhaka EPZ has been blamed for altering the fragile environment of the surrounding areas. Surface water has been contaminated by industrial effluents released from the Dhaka EPZ and the flow of groundwater has been disrupted.



**Dhaka Export Processing Zone front gate. Photo by The Daily Star (7 May 2009).**





**Water pollution caused by industrial waste dumping near the Dhaka EPZ killed rice paddies.**  
*Photo by The Daily Star (7 May 2009).*

Almost all tributaries of major systems have already been saturated with pollution with a number already practically dead. The stench can be unbearable and groundwater is no longer safe to drink.

The Dhaka EPZ has 92 industrial units that have been determined to be the leading polluters. In many cases, toxic wastewater is used for irrigation, thus contaminating the agricultural land as well. The reddish-brown color of Modhupur/Barind Tract formation, for example, is clearly related to the iron compounds. The sewerage system of the EPZ areas has been completely damaged.

### **CASE STUDY- UTTARA EPZ**

The Uttara EPZ was established in 2001. Half of the 18 investors are Bangladeshi and the other half are foreigners. It is at Shongalshi, Nilphamari, about 409 kilometers from Dhaka Airport.

### **Water and soil pollution due to Uttara EPZ**

The Uttara Export Processing Zone (UEPZ) is considered the industrial belt of the northern region of the country. Because of the heavy industrial activity at the site, it is vital to consider the impact on the environment, particularly on the water.

Industrial activities are a threat to the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources in many parts of the world (Allen et al., 1996). These activities, by their nature, consume, divert, and can seriously pollute water resources. There, it may pollute the natural surface drainage and other water resources (Singh et al., 2007).

### **STATE POLICIES AND MECHANISM**

The Constitution of Bangladesh protects the land rights of all classes of citizens. As such, policies and laws are in place protecting agricultural land and people's access to the resource.



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However, land grabbing is still happening through various means, and not just by individuals but also by the government in the name of development, such as what is happening with the grabbing of agricultural land for EPZs.

***The Constitution of the Peoples’ Republic of Bangladesh.*** The Constitution of the Peoples’ Republic of Bangladesh (Article 42 of the Constitution) ensures the right to land as a fundamental right: Every citizen shall have the right to hold, acquire, transfer and dispose of property.

***The 1950 State Acquisition and Tenancy Act.*** The 1950 State Acquisition and Tenancy Act: Agricultural land use for other purpose is prohibited. If needed, permission should be sought at the revenue office for classification change.

***National Land Use Policy of 2001.*** Stopping the high conversion rate of agricultural land to non-agricultural purpose. Measures are spelled out to discourage the conversion of agricultural land for urban or development purpose.

***The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority Act of 1980.*** Different industries in Bangladesh are regulated by the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006. But the EPZs are regulated by a different law. The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) issues directives on

service matters concerning workers and officers employed in companies operating within the export processing zones of Bangladesh in exercise of the powers conferred by the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority Act 1980.

This Act states that: “Power to create zones - The Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare any place or places to be specified in the notification to be an Export Processing Zone for the purposes of this Act. Acquisition of land for a zone - Where any land or any interest in any land is required by the Authority for any of its purposes under this Act that land or the interest therein may be acquired by the Government under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, for the Authority and the land or interest therein so acquired shall be deemed to be required for a public purpose.”

#### ***Other related Land laws and land policies of Bangladesh***

- The Stamp Act, 1899 (II of 1899);
- The Companies Act, 1913 (VII of 1913);
- The Excises and Salt Act, 1944 (I of 1944);
- The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947 (VII of 1947);
- The Employment of Labour (Standing Orders) Act, 1965 (VIII of 1965);
- The Industrial Relations Ordinance, 1969 (XXIII of 1969);
- The Land Development Tax Ordinance, 1976 (XLII of 1976);
- The Income-tax Ordinance, 1984 (XXXVI of 1984);
- The Municipality Taxation Act, 1881 (Ben. Act IX of 1881);
- The Explosives Act, 1884 (IV of 1884);
- The Electricity Act, 1910 (IX of 1910);
- The Boilers Act, 1923 (V of 1923);
- The Building Construction Act, 1952 (E.B. Act II of 1953);

- The Fire Service Ordinance, 1959 (E.P. Ord. XVII of 1959);
- The Factories Act, 1965 (E.P. Act IV of 1965);
- The Chittagong Municipal Corporation Ordinance, 1982 (xxv of 1982);
- Transfer of Property Act, 1882;
- Khas Land Settlement Policy for Hotel Motel, 1998;
- Balu Mohal and Sand Management Rules, 2011;
- Charing Mohal Management Policy, 1998;
- Jal Mahal Management Policy, 2009;
- Vested Property Amendment Law 2011;
- The Acquisition and Requisition of Immovable Properties Ordinance, 1982;
- Registration Act of 1908; and,
- The Development Tax Ordinance, 1976.

In terms of mechanism, BEPZA is a government body that is mandated to promote, attract and facilitate a wide range of foreign investments in EPZs. Its vision is to become a significant contributor to the economic development of Bangladesh.

Its mission is to strengthen the economic base of Bangladesh through industrialization, promotion of investment, increased exports and employment generation in the EPZs, which are export-oriented industrial enclaves that provide the infrastructure, facilities, administrative and support services for enterprises.

BEPZA, along with the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), jointly control and manage EPZs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on focus group discussions with CSOs as well as the author's personal observations, review of

relevant articles online, study papers, research papers, and published stories in newspapers, etc.

Research reveals that the Government of Bangladesh itself is the main aggressor behind the grabbing of agricultural land to establish EPZs.

However, it is duty bound to follow and maintain inclusive tenure rights, land governance and environmental policy with the aim of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The government is likewise mandated to follow the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP-BHR) as part of implementing the UN "Protect, Respect, Remedy" Framework approved in 2011.

### **Protect**

The government should ensure that joint ventures, management contracts, and marketing agreements, among others, are fair and legal. Economic and environmental risks and benefits must be equitably shared among the investors, companies and the related communities.

BEPZA should set up inspection and grievance handling mechanisms. Punishment for non-compliance with BEPZA directives should be detailed in BEPZA directives.

Regarding land grabbing, the extent of agricultural land lost to industrialization should be determined. There should be updated information compiled in a database.

There should also be clear rules and regulations governing land acquisition; how much land the government can acquire, keeping in mind that agricultural land is necessary to ensure food security.



## Respect

Engage CSOs/NGOs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and land rights defenders to raise their voice against land grabbing, thereby raising awareness of the related issues. Victims or affected communities should be properly identified to better understand their circumstances.

The government should provide ample space for CSOs to engage or participate in the formulation of the government's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, and for them to help ensure the proper application of existing or amended/reformulated policies and laws against land grabbing.

And just as importantly, the government should ensure that food sovereignty, nutrition, or livelihood of the communities, especially of vulnerable groups such as women, farmers, fisherfolk, forest dwellers, informal settlers, and PWDs, whose rights to the land and resources may be affected, are not threatened by the investors or companies.

## Remedy

Destructive strategies by companies and authorities behind land grabbing should be prohibited.

The government should protect agricultural land for the sake of food security. It should control through legislation the building of commercial establishments. Plus, it should ensure that the principles of the UNGPs are followed.

Representatives from the Ministry of Labour should sit on the Board of Governors of BEPZA, the Executive Board, and the Consultative Committee

of the Executive Board. Worker representatives should sit on the Consultative Committee so that their issues will be heard.

Documents, articles, leaflets, posters and journals documenting land grabbing should be drawn up and disseminated to create more awareness among the general public on the dangers of the practice.

Communities displaced by the government in the establishment of the EPZs must be safely relocated and provided just compensation and restitution. ■

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## DISCLAIMER

The views of this study do not necessarily reflect of those of ILC.



## ACRONYMS

ANGOC	Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development
BEPZA	Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority
BEZA	Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority
BIDA	Bangladesh Investment Development Authority
CEPZ	Chittagong Export Processing Zone
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEPZ	Dhaka Export Processing Zone
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
RAJUK	Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakka
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights