



INTRODUCTION

The Asia and the Pacific region experience the highest frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events. Around 72 percent of the total frequency of intense natural disasters was recorded in Asia and Pacific between 1971 to 2020 (Thomas, et. al., 2013). Further, data from the Annual Disaster Statistical Review Reports shows that six of the top ten countries most hit by natural disasters between 2006 to 2015 were in Asia, including China, India, Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal (Guha-Sapir, et. al., 2016).

Not only are countries in Asia the most hit by natural disasters, they are also considered the most vulnerable. The high frequency and impact of disasters in Asia is largely due to the size of the continent and landscapes that present high risks of natural hazards, such as river basins, flood plains, and seismic fault lines. Additionally, there are high population densities in many disaster-prone areas of the continent.

Many Asian countries also have large growing populations with a high proportion of poor people living with tenure insecurity that lessens their resiliency to the adverse effects of disasters. Coupled with land degradation, poverty reduces the ability of communities to respond to the effects of climate change. In developing countries of Asia, poverty incidences are high and remain prevalently rural and agricultural. Rural poverty is strongly linked to the lack of access to land – due to landlessness and deprivation, insecure tenure, and contested land rights.

Poverty and the lack of tenure security heighten the risks of people to the effects of natural disasters and climate change. To put disaster risk in its proper perspective, approximately an equal number of people are exposed annually to tropical cyclones in Japan and the Philippines. Yet, a cyclone of the same intensity would kill 17 times more Filipinos due to the country's greater level of vulnerability, including poor standards of housing and infrastructure, and the numbers of poor people settled in at-risk areas (IDMC, 2013).

Thus, rural poor who have weak or no land tenure rights are among the most vulnerable to the direct effects of climate change, both because insecure land tenure reduces the incentives and capacities to take good care of the land to mitigate or adapt to the effects of climate change, and because without secure tenure rights, disasters can easily lead to land loss and migration, exacerbated by land grabbing and the loss of documents. Yet, public understanding of the links between climate change, disasters, and land tenure is still very limited, leading to poor prevention and wrong response, while those without land or are near landless remain voiceless, and are often left out of climate change discussions.



Thus in 2020, the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) prepared a discussion paper as a contribution to this topic (link: <https://angoc.org/portal/no-time-to-waste-climate-action-through-secure-land-rights-and-sustainable-land-use/>).

A major recommendation of the said paper is to build better understanding and appreciation of land tenure issues in climate change discussions by “humanizing” the issue and by amplifying the voice of the marginalized. This can be achieved by collecting more evidence and people’s stories, towards a better understanding and appreciation of land tenure issues in climate change discussions.

In July 2022, ANGOC and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR/GFAiR) organized a webinar to share the findings and recommendations of the study. The participants committed to pursue the initiative, which led to the development of a pilot program of collective action among GFAR/GFAiR, ANGOC, and the Land Portal Foundation (LPF). Such collective action aims to foster better informed and more inclusively designed climate disaster prevention and resilience policies by mainstreaming the land rights of the rural poor in the climate discourse. For more details, see <https://www.gfar.net/content/collective-action-land-tenure-climate-change>.

At the same time, part of the current work program of the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) is to create an understanding of the cross-cutting dimensions of land with climate change. Even with the growing awareness on climate change, there is still limited understanding and response in addressing the nexus of the impacts of climate change, social and policy responses, and need for land tenure security.

Thus, ANGOC and the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) jointly organized this conference on “Mainstreaming land rights in the narrative of climate change: views from the ground” in partnership with GFAR/GFAiR, GLTN, and LPF. This event likewise contributes to the ongoing initiative of ALRD on land rights as supported by Bread for the World.

This blended event – participation was both face-to-face and virtual – created greater understanding and analysis on the importance of land tenure rights in the climate change discourse. It brought some 81 representatives (21 females, 60 males) from rural communities, CSOs, international organizations, Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission, officials of the Government of Bangladesh, media organizations, and academe.

Case studies were documented in selected communities in Asia and Africa regions to:

- ◆ illustrate how the lack of tenure security and resource rights increases the vulnerability of the rural poor, and reduces their capacity to cope with the changes brought about by climate change;

- ◆ identify and analyze climate change responses by authorities and other stakeholders that impact on land tenure security;
- ◆ illustrate the relationships between land tenure, climate change vulnerability, and adaptive capacity; and,
- ◆ recommend policies and/or call to action to address the identified issues/gaps.

The case studies were grouped under five thematic areas:

Theme	Description
Women, land rights, and resiliency	How women’s rights, especially over land, improves the capacities of families and communities to implement resilience
Customary tenure, use, and governance	How recognizing customary land rights and practices of indigenous communities helps build local capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change
Land rights and sustainable land/resource use	How secure tenure rights encourages sustainable land use by communities in ways that protect and restore their environment
Coping with risks and preventing disputes	How those with secure tenure are less likely to be at risk of land disputes, which may affect their adaptive capacity, or vice-versa
Rebuilding after disasters	How tenure security/insecurity affects the post-disaster capacity of people to recover and rebuild

Capturing the main conclusions and recommendations of the conference, the Dhaka Declaration was formulated, discussed and finalized by the participants.