

Stop grabbing of Agricultural land in the name of development projects or Real Estate Industry

Saving agricultural land to ensure food security is MUST

The food security of Bangladesh is unavoidably related with the agriculture. Some recent studies say that, the agricultural land is being decreased by 1% in every year for various reasons. In every year a huge part of land is being grabbed with the help of various unscrupulous excuses. These incidents are infuriating the increasing vulnerability of food security situation.

State of poverty and food security in Bangladesh

Even though the annual growth rate of Bangladesh is 6.3% and though it is doing pretty much well in food production compared to other developing countries, 32% people of this country are still living under the poverty line, 40% of the total population are getting less food than essential, 26% people are suffering from chronic food insecurity, 50 million people cannot meet their basic needs. There are about 47 million poor; among them 22.6 million people are categorized as extreme poor.

Access to land and Food Security

Discrimination in distribution of land or agricultural land is one of the key reasons of food insecurity in Bangladesh. Different studies show that, there are strong relationship between control or ownership of land and the food security. People with more lands are enjoying comparatively more food security. A landless people can take 2194 calorie of food daily, which is slightly more than the extreme poor can get (2122 calories). A landless can afford 2.3% less health service than the landowner. A landless gets 4.7 less education opportunities than a landowner. Literacy rate among women from landowner families are 36.9% more compared to the women from landless families. 24.8% more male from the landowners family are literate than the male from the landless families.

Land distribution in Bangladesh

If we analyze the ownership pattern of land in Bangladesh, we will find that there are huge discriminations. 89% of total population own less than 1 hectare of land, 39% population own 0.2% of total land. The laws determining the ceiling of land control are being useless. The laws of 1950 made the ceiling of maximum 33 acres and then the law of 1983 determined 22 acres as the ceiling.

In 1960 10% families owned the 37% of total land, in 1996 some changes occurred, 2.1% families had become owner of 17.3% of total agricultural land. 70% of total population own only 15% of agricultural land. In 1960 the percentage of landless population was 19%, in 1996 it stood at 56%. A recent study says that,

71% of total population are landless, poor and marginalized.

State of land grabbing in Bangladesh: Types and Statistics

Due to commercialization Bangladesh has been losing 595.87 bighas (197 acres) of cultivable land in each year. In 1972 cultivable land per village was 160 acres; in 2009 it becomes only 43.3 acres. From 1972 to 2009 total 2667000 acres of cultivable land have become uncultivable. As a result, every year 44 thousand farmers have been forced to migrate to other profession, during the last two decades 155000 farmers have been migrated to other profession in every year. If the grabbing or encroachment is going on in such a way, report says that, within 2025 50% of the total land of Bangladesh will be gone under human habitation.

The influential are grabbing land using various unscrupulous ways. Making false documents, influencing the authorities and the courts are the key strategies of grabbing lands. In February 2011 the Minister for Land informed the parliament that, 1.3 million acres of public land was being grabbed by influential. These grabbed lands are hardly use for the agriculture; rather these are being used for mainly industries or real estate business.

Some government offices and officials are also found involved in land grabbing. Building offices, quarters for the officials and lending hands to the land grabbers are the key types of their involvement. Intentional silence or lacking of proper initiatives from the government officials are making the land grabbing situation more miserable.

There are discriminations and anomalies also in the distribution of government lands to the poor, landless and marginalized. Report shows that, only 11.5% distribution was made according to the policies and the remaining 88.5% government lands had been gone to people who are not illegible but had influences.

Key features of the land grabbers

Class analysis of the land grabbers in Bangladesh will identify that, rich businessmen, political leaders, civil

and military bureaucrats are the avant-garde in the land grabbing. In the decade of 80, at the beginning of the Neo-liberal economy in Bangladesh, especially the 1982 industrial policy created some opportunity for some quarters. They had come pretty close to the power. Using that power they began to grab lands in various excuses. On the other hand, privatization and diminishing subsidy in agriculture made it hard for the poor to survive and to get lands.

Premonitions for the future

It is already mentioned that, land grabbing is decreasing the cultivable land in 1% in each year. Besides the cultivable lands the fishing bodies are also being grabbed by the rich and the influential. The open water bodies, the fishing places are being leased to the rich, which is why the fishers are being deprived of fishing. In each year a good number of fisher are being forced to migrate to other professions. In the southern part of the country the shrimp hatcheries are grabbing cultivable lands.

Climate change will also have an impact on the agriculture. Bangladesh's food security situation is also vulnerable due to the impact of the climate change. Scientists predict that, the agricultural products of Bangladesh will be drastically hampered due to the impact of climate change. Production of rice and wheat will be decreased; salinity intrusion will also decrease cultivable lands, the irregular or erratic rainfall will decrease rice production in the northern part of the country.

Import of foods has already been increased. It will be increased again in near future. In 1985-86 total food import was 113 thousand metric ton, in 2010-11 total food import was 5150 metric ton! On the other hand food aid in 1985-86 was 1087 metric ton while in 2010-11 it stood at only 162.7 metric ton. So import is being increased and food aid is being decreased. It is a deadly sign in terms of the food security. This recent trends gives a premonition that, in future Bangladesh will be a country with food insecurity, because, in future food aid will be decreased and import will also be hard even with money. In 2008 Bangladesh government was fail to import food from India and Vietnam.

Our Demands

We believe that, to ensure food security saving of the agricultural land of Bangladesh is must and all types of grabbing should be stopped. Our specific demands in this regards are as follows:

- ✓ Immediate land reform
- ✓ Strong laws and policy on transforming cultivable land into other purposive lands
- ✓ Recover the grabbed public lands
- ✓ Distribute the government land to the poor and marginalized
- ✓ Ensuring sustainable agriculture, reduce dependency on hybrid or GMO
- ✓ Redistribute agricultural lands and implement the laws regarding the ceiling.

Participating Organizations

Arpon, Aso, Bangladesh Bhumihin Somity, Bangladesh Krishok Federation, CDP, DCI, EquityBD, Krishani Sova, Online Knowledge Society, Manush Manusher Jonno, Self Development, Surokha O Agrogati Foundation, United People Trust, Unnayan Dhara Trust, Voice.



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