



Dhaka Declaration on Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Agriculture

Dhaka, Bangladesh
23-25, September 2008

We, the members of social movements, peasant organizations, labour unions, fishers folks organizations, women's groups and civil society organizations and human rights organisations from different SAARC countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan & Sri Lanka) have gathered here in Dhaka from 23-25 September, 2008 to share experiences and develop collective strategies to face and challenge the ongoing food crisis and imminent threats of global warming.

We have observed with great concern that the poverty is intensifying in South Asia and small and marginal peasants, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, poor workers in the informal sectors, women in particular are becoming the worst victims of hunger and malnutrition. We have further found that poor peasants have little access to productive and natural resources like land, water, forests, seeds and other means of production to practice agriculture in a sustainable way in order to ensure their livelihoods.

The food and agricultural policies, as adopted by the nation states in this region, are based on neo-liberal principles and are promoted by IFIs (WB, IMF, ADB etc) and MNCs, which have intensified food crisis and have increased environmental catastrophes. The nation-states have failed to mainstream the principles of food sovereignty in policies and programmes to ensure right to food and livelihoods of people. Particularly non implementation of genuine agrarian reform and reforms in other sectors have affected the vulnerable groups like, poor peasants, peasant-women, fisher folk, Dalits and Tribal communities most. This discrimination is rooted in structural inequity existing in our society for generations and is further intensified in the era of neo-liberalization.

We have further observed with great concern that agro-fuel has been promoted through government policies, supported by WB & IMF, ostensibly to overcome fuel crisis and to address climate change threats. However, in reality agro-fuel expansion is only increasing the profits of the multinationals at the cost of food security of millions of poor in our countries.

Sustainable agriculture practices have been systematically discouraged and traditional

knowledge and practices have been dismantled in the name of modernization of agriculture and increase in food production. Land alienation of poor, displacements and loss of livelihood has emerged as big issues of concerns in the region. In this context we have also noted the decision of the SAARC states to create the 'food bank' in the region to address the food crisis. We strongly feel that creating the 'food bank' alone will not resolve the present food crisis. In order to address the food crisis adequately, fundamental structural and political changes are needed at national/regional levels. With this collective understanding we urge our governments to take the following measures:

1. The nation states in South Asia should implement genuine agrarian reform immediately to enable the poor peasants to have effective access and control over land, water and other productive and natural resources.
2. The state policies should ensure that poor peasants do not become victims of land alienations and displacements due to unproductive usages of land, privatization and commercialization process in agriculture.
3. Adequate and effective policies should be adopted to protect and preserve biodiversity of the region and to promote traditional knowledge and practices in agriculture. The nation states have the obligation to ensure peasants access to traditional seeds. Sustainable agriculture practices should be encouraged through researches, documentations and financial support from the state.
4. The state policies should support small and marginal peasants from unfair open market competitions by providing support and subsidies in agriculture inputs, especially by creating public institutions and by ensuring appropriate price of the agriculture products.
5. The state should prioritize right to food obligations over corporate profit interests and should immediately ban conversion of agricultural lands for non agricultural purposes like Special Economic Zones, Export Processing Zones, unplanned expansion of urbanization, production of agro-fuel etc.
6. As WTO negotiations have undermined food sovereignty of the people in our region, we strongly urge our governments to support the civil society position "WTO out of Agriculture"
7. While we appreciate the steps taken by most of our governments to introduce/reinforce public distribution system and employment guarantee schemes to meet with the present food crisis challenge, but we strongly feel that these efforts have to be inclusive with a focus on most vulnerable communities and should be implemented in a transparent and accountable manner at grassroots.

8. We urge the governments to take side with the agreement under Kyoto/UNFCCC frameworks which has underlined policies for compensation from Annex 1 / developed countries and also the deep cut in emission by developed countries which is 20%-40% by 2020 from the level of 1990.

9. We also urge the governments in our countries to oppose the conspiracies of G 8 countries and IFIs which undermining the UNFCCC framework and funding through GEF for climate justice. We further urge the government of Bangladesh in particular and all other governments of this region to oppose UK intention to invite World Bank to manage multi donor trust fund for Bangladesh.

10. Finally we congratulate the people and the government of Nepal for making food sovereignty a fundamental right in their new interim Constitution. At the same time we urge all other governments in our region to acknowledge 'Food sovereignty' as a fundamental right of people to be enshrined in the constitutions of the respective countries.

Above all we believe that a democratic governance system is imperative to provide space to all actors in the society, especially poor actors like peasants, women, labourers, fisher folk in the informal sectors, Dalits, tribal communities in raising their voices and in asserting their legitimate rights. We feel that genuine political will is a precondition to create the above conducive environment so the peasants' rights have been fully realized.

We the participants of this workshop reaffirm our position against neo-liberal policies and commit ourselves to create social movements for promotion of food sovereignty and for ensuring sustainable agriculture in the region.

Dhaka, 25th September 2008

A total 45 organizations from different countries from South Asia adopted the declaration and decided to send the declaration to food ministry of respective countries on the eve of World Food Day on 16 October 2008. The participants also agreed to formulate country position paper in each country on food crisis with recommendations to forward to the Meeting of FAO to be held on Kathmandu, Nepal in October 2008. The participating organizations also called to take joint actions and mobilization on the World Food Day (16 October 2008) as Food Action Day in all South Asian countries. The Food Action Day will be observed by giving emphasis on mobilization activities like demonstration, rally, discussion, cultural events and giving memorandum to policy leaders in all SA countries.