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Bangladesh

Caravan for Food Sovereignty Climate and Gender Justice hits the road

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The inaugural function of the Bangladesh-India-Nepal caravan on Climate Justice, Gender and Food Sovereignty took place on 10 November 2014 at 11am at Shahid Reshel Manch in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. As good as three hundred people including foreign delegates from Australia, Germany, UK, USA, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sweden and New Zealand attended the inaugural. The inaugural was preceded by the press conference held on 9 November 2014 at Dhaka Reporters Unity. Different Electronic Medias broadcast and quite a number of dailies gave coverage of the news of the press conference.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation President, Badrul Alam inaugurated the caravan with an introductory presentation on the objectives of the caravan while other leaders such as, Bangladesh Kishani Sabha Organizing Secretary Asma Begum, Bangladesh Adivasi Samity President Sree Biswnath Singh, Bangladesh Agricultural Farm Labor Federation General Secretary Abdul Majid, Friends of Bangladesh(Australia) Member Emma, Ekattra-An Urban Youth Organization President Meghna Alam spoke in the meeting.

Badrul Alam emphasized the question of agro-ecology as an alternative to industrial agriculture. "The earth's future is alarming due to climate change. We need a deep cut in carbon emissions from developed countries, as they are responsible for climate change. They need to pay their historical and ecological dues to the Global South who are most affected by the climate crisis!" he told.

He also said that the main objective of the caravan is to reach out the grassroots people and communities who are facing the serious impact of the climate change. Furthermore, it aims at building awareness among the people on the climate change and building solidarity in South Asia in order to realize climate justice.

The declaration to be formulated with opinion of the grassroots people with regard to alternatives at the end of caravan will be put forward to Lima, Peru where the next UNFCCC takes place in December this year. He urged the policy makers to give up false solutions to climate change like CDM, REDD+, agro-fuel, GMOs, green economy, etc. The alternative is the proposal coming out of the Mother Earth's Right conference held in Bolivia in 2010 and the proposal of La Via Campesina, an international network of peasants' organizations.

Bringing GMOs into focus

The caravan moved on the next day to Gajipur district, 80 kilometers away from the capital Dhaka. A morning plenary on the issues issue of GMOs and their impact on the environment and on women at Bangladesh Rice Research Institute(BRRI) where there is a test field of Bt brinjal, a transgenic variety of aubergine [1].Bt. brinjal is banned in India whereas it has been introduced in Bangladesh with the help of Mahico-Indian Pesticide Company and Monsanto.

Presided over by Badrul Alam, the meeting was addressed by Dr. Jiban Krishna Biswas who is Director General of BRRI and Dr. Ansar Ali who is Director (Research) of BRRI, Debika of Pesticide Action Network from USA and others. Speakers questioned the authority for the introduction, approval and commercialization of Bt.brinjal in Bangladesh. They expressed concern with environmental, ecological and health risks of Bt, brinjal. They rejected the optimism around Bt. brinjal as an answer to climate change. People have already witnessed the crops fail. Instead they support the collection of local seeds of brinjal which are protected, conserved and restored by the peasant

women in the country out of the grip of the multinationals. They said that the promotion and commercialization of Bt. brinjal would make the peasant women unemployed in the rural areas. President Badrul Alam emphasized that indigenous seeds which has been promoted by the peasants for thousands of years, which is suitable to the aged old traditional farming method, which is environment friendly.

After the plenary based on the issue the participants split into 4 groups. There were 190 participants in total. Every group went through brain-storming on the GMOs and Bt. Brinjal and its impact on human health, agriculture, ecology and the economy of the country. The participants put emphasis on the local seeds which are sustainable, healthy and safe. The participants in Gajipur had the scope for sight-seeing as well as for witnessing the Bt. Brinjal test filed. They also shared the concern about GMOs with higher officials of BARRI in a dialogue in the evening. They proposed to the authority to ban the Bt. Brinjal keeping in view its negative impact.

Crossing Bangladesh

On 12 November 2014 at BADC (Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation) in Madhupur, Tangail there was a seminar on agro-ecology; grassroots solutions to climate change; food sovereignty and indigenous peoples land right. 170 participants attended the seminar. After the seminar the participants divided into four groups. There were significant numbers of indigenous from the area. The participants expressed their concern about the condition of indigenous peoples' rights. They are of the opinion that indigenous people are very close to the nature and preserve the ecology and are the first victims of global climate change. The outcomes of the group discussion were put forward to the plenary again. The participants visited solar water pump and seed processing center in Madhupur. An interaction meeting with agricultural farm labors followed the seminar and workshops. They was also an evening meeting with organic pineapple tillers in Madhupur, Tangail.

On 13 November 2014 in Iswardi, Pabna a seminar was held on renewable energy and zero waste in Sugarcane Research Institute took place. The DG of the Institute Dr, ASM Nurun Nahar spoke the seminar expressing solidarity with the caravan. She said that they did not promote any GMOs in their institute but are trying to promote sugar beet to increase sugar production of to fulfill demand. Jarrad Sferruzzi from Australia elaborate the impact of the coal based energy production in Australia and advocated renewable energy as an alternative to fossil fuel. He stressed the recycling of waste to respond to climate change.

The president of Bangladesh Krishok Federation discussed the broader aspect of climate change and proposed to UNFCCC to accept the grassroots people' thoughts around solutions to climate change. He said that the real solutions lie in the grassroots consisting of community people. He said adding that use of solar power, windmill, bio-gas, small hydro-electric power generation, charcoal, limited scale geo-thermal power generation can guarantee the clean energy. The seminar rejected the existing energy security based on fossil fuel mining which jeopardizes the usual decoration of nature. He told the audience that nature has become angry to the human being because of over exploitation of it. He also mentioned that extractive industries operated by TNCs are generating the dirty energy which is pushing the planet into destruction instead of energy security. There were 165 participants in the seminar in Iswardi, Pabna. In the end of the seminar, the participants were grouped in into 4 for workshops. After closing of the workshops the participants visited the different sugarcane fields promoted by the institute. The report back of the workshops took place in the field while enjoying the sugarcane juice.

On 14 November 2014 in Sadhuhati, Jhenaidah a seminar was held with the participation of local communities on climate change, climate migrants, grassroots adaptation and mitigation. Badrul Alam and Anna from Sweden led the discussion with 300 participants. The seminar felt that the rights of climate migrants should be protected by the UN convention. Adaptation and mitigation are taking place at different levels in the affected countries but the responsible countries should have deep and drastic cut in their emission levels immediately. They must pay reparations to the

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people of the affected country as their historic and ecological dues. The participants asked all South Asian governments to be active in order to realize the reparation for the people affected by climate change. Earlier the participants visited the pesticide and chemical free organic vegetable cultivation and harvested eggplant, cauliflower, beans, etc.

On 15 November 2014 in Cotton Research and Seed Multiplication Farm at Jagadishpur in Chaugachha, Jessore a seminar on grassroots networking in South Asia and next UNFCCC conference in Lima, Peru took place. Badrul Alam elaborated the relevance of grassroots networking for the climate justice. There was a question and answer session at the end of deliberation. Scientific Officer of the institute and other leaders of peasants' organizations spoke on the issues. Three representatives of local non-government organizations also participated in the seminar. The seminar agreed to form a network with grassroots movements existing in South Asia to combat the climate change. A short visit to the agricultural labor in Seed Processing and Production Farm of BADC in Chuadanga district preceded the Seminar. There was also a short dialogue with the Assistant Director General of the farm.

On 16 November 2014 in the morning the caravan crossed the Indian border to Kolkata, West Bengal. In a week the caravan travelled around 850 kilometers within Bangladesh, crossed 10 districts, stayed in 6 destinations, and touched one station meeting different community people on the way. Throughout the caravan leaflets and booklets were distributed among the local people to make them aware of the objectives of the caravan and the issue of climate change. The whole week was so educational, interactive and experience sharing for the participants. The productivity in terms of lesson-learned was enormous. The impact of the caravan on the locality will be long lasting. People's feelings of sustainability in agriculture will bring fruits. It will contribute to the dream of a peasant based agroecology and help the dreams to come true.

Based on reports on [Via Campesina](#) and direct from the caravan itself.

[1] eggplant