

## Food Sovereignty Network South Asia Newsletter, May 2011

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Editorial \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Friends!

Welcome to Food Sovereignty Network South Asia's e-newsletter.

Food Sovereignty Network South Asia (FSNSA) is a loose network of NGOs, CSOs, CBOs and People's movements of South Asia and it is presently active in six major South Asian countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The network carries out various activities both at national and regional levels for advancement of realization of human rights, good governance, justice and equity in order to promote a conducive climate for food sovereignty.

We all know South Asia is still the hotspot of hunger in the world, despite various commitments of the national governments and global institutions to reduce poverty significantly in this region. Millennium Development Goals have turned out to be largely inadequate to address the poverty and hunger situation in South Asia and recent threefold crisis of food price, fuel and finance have further worsened hunger scenario of this region.

Though all South Asian governments are party to various human rights treaties and agreements and as per human rights obligations should take proactive steps to ensure right to food and access to food producing resources for poor but in reality increasing landlessness has emerged as a great concern in South Asia. On the one hand land is being taken away from the poor in the name of 'development', investments etc. and on the other hand majority of the nation states have systematically abandoned the agenda of redistributive land reform and agrarian reform, which could have made small holding agriculture economically viable in South Asia. In absence of such positive and proactive state interventions, land has been increasingly perceived as a commodity, the use and access of which are to be determined by the global market mechanisms and commercial pressure on land has tremendously increased in South Asia, intensifying landlessness of small and marginal peasants further. Particularly peasant women are the worst sufferers as they often have no legal land title and they face systematic gender discrimination in the patriarchal society.

Failure of government policies to support small scale agriculture in the rural belt of our South Asian countries has resulted into corporatisation of agriculture, job loss in agriculture and has increased rural-urban migration. Thus urban poverty has also intensified in already crowded cities of South Asia. Climate change concerns have further contributed to this gloomy scenario. Majority of South Asian countries have experienced frequent cyclones, floods and other forms of natural disasters in the recent past and thousands of rural dwellers have lost their lands and livelihoods due to such calamities. However, the governments of South Asia are yet to come up with a participatory effective plan of action, to combat climate threats in coming years without compromising the rights of poor.

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FSNSA believes that it is the fundamental rights of poor to have access to food, food producing resources and employment/income opportunities. The state is duty bound to ensure these rights. However, present neo-liberal model of development is curbing rights of people by allowing livelihoods of the people to be determined by the global market demands and supplies. In other words, we have experienced how neo-liberal policies in South Asia emphasized on Profit over People and Planet. FSNSA strongly feels that the fundamental need is to challenge neo-liberal development paradigm, which is promoting wrong notion of development and exploiting our people.

To challenge neo-liberal global paradigm, communities in our countries have focused on Food Sovereignty as people's development paradigm. Food Sovereignty is described as "The right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances". FSNSA is working in six South Asian countries to make people and policy makers aware of food sovereignty and the need of adopting the principles of food sovereignty in policies and practices regarding development. To this end FSNSA encourages its country partners to document people's experiences (on alternative development initiatives at communities, on good governance, on gender justice etc.) and to carry out evidence based lobby and advocacy works with the state actors and multi-stakeholders of the Civil Society. FSNSA strongly believes that Food Sovereignty can be ensured through a change in priorities in South Asian politics. Therefore, FSNSA does active lobby work with politicians and policy makers in South Asia. FSNSA is further willing to strengthen its work with SAARC in future in order to create a space for Civil Society in this regional body, not only as observer but as contributor in the regional policy making process.

FSNSA is a growing network in South Asia and it is linked with various other similar networks from different parts of the world. We believe in global solidarity and collective campaign for food sovereignty but at the same time we feel the need to discuss the region specific pertinent issues in South Asia and to find solutions collectively in our region, which has its unique geo-political, economic and cultural features. We hope to receive your solidarity and support in our endeavours.

With best wishes

Dr. Ujjaini Halim

(Coordinator)

FSNSA

## **Workshop on Contemporary Food Sovereignty Issues: Searching Future Strategies for Bangladesh**

FSNSA organized a workshop on “Contemporary Food Sovereignty Issues: Searching Future Strategies for Bangladesh” jointly with Karmojibi Nari (KN) on February 15, 2011 at Dhaka.

Ms. Shirin Akhter, Founder President of Karmojibi Nari welcomed all the participants in this workshop as the local host. Among the eminent persons who attended the workshop mention may be made of Honorable Member of Parliament Adv. Shah Zikrul Ahmed, Ms. Khushi Kabir, Executive Director of Nijera Kori, Ms. Nirupa Dewan, Member of National Human Rights Commission, Mr. Shamsul Huda, Executive Director, ALRD, Rashed –Al- Titumir, Professor of Dhaka University, A.M. Badrul Hasan, Member of Steering Committee, CSRL, Ziaul Haque Mukta, Member Secretary, CSRL, Mr. Abdul Majid of BAFLF, Mr. Shubol Sarkar, President, Bhumiheen Samiti. Shri Biplab Halim and Dr. Ujjaini Halim also attended the workshop representing FSNSA.



The participants generally said our global food system is terribly broken, with nearly a billion hungry people around the world. Corporate agriculture that privatizes and despoils our water, soil and biodiversity is largely to be blamed for this. In this context the concept of Food Sovereignty was discussed in detail. The significance of people having access to land and other natural resources was primarily discussed. The participants from Bangladesh drew attention to the fact that Bangladesh belongs to the poorest group of nations in the world and its present land governance pattern is affecting poor peasants the most and depriving them of the basic right to food. In the present neo-liberal era that is primarily characterized by land grabbing, landlessness and practice of converting agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes, access to land is a pre-condition to have access to safe, wholesome and culturally appropriate food. In the field of food and agriculture serious concerns were raised about the model of industrial agriculture which is chemical intensive. Concerns were also raised for ecological and health impact of GM crops. The necessity to launch campaign against GM crops was stressed upon. Food Sovereignty is an umbrella framework in which different food security related concerns could be incorporated. In course of discussion it became evident that all the organizations present in the workshop were doing commendable work on food security and upholding/promoting rights of people. It was decided that the organizations working on these issues independently could sometimes come together to express collective solidarity and to strengthen certain issue based campaign for food security. At the same time it was also discussed that the organizations could consider integrating principles of Food Sovereignty in their everyday work for promoting the notion of Food Sovereignty.

The workshop highlighted the need to execute existing international commitments agreed upon by our nation states through effectual lobby and advocacy works at national and regional levels based on concrete cases from various South Asian nations. Other issues that came up in the discussion include formulation of new policies or revision of

existing policies in relation to agriculture, industry, land and other related areas keeping in mind the interest of common people.

After a comprehensive discussion for the whole day, Food Sovereignty Network Bangladesh was formed and it was decided that newly formed Food Sovereignty Network Bangladesh would work closely with FSNSA towards realization of human rights, good governance, righteousness and justice in various South Asian countries in order to promote notion of food sovereignty. It was further decided that FSN Bangladesh would independently carry out regular follow up activities.

### **National Consultation on Food Sovereignty in Negombo, Sri Lanka**

A national consultation on Food Sovereignty was organized on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 at NAFSO training centre, in Sri Lanka by NAFSO and supported by FSNSA. Several NGO and CSO representatives from all over the country participated in the Consultation.

Among the major issues that came up in the discussion mention may be made of land grabbing and selling of 14 islands at Kalpitiya for promotion of tourism and the mega development projects and resultant loss of livelihood. Furthermore issues like introduction of genetically modified foods and MNCs involvement, steep rise in food prices and lack of acceptance of people's traditional knowledge in relation to food production and processing were also discussed.

The need for developing a holistic vision of alternative development paradigm, that is, Food sovereignty was discussed. Agro-ecological model of production need to be promoted and Government must support agro ecological approaches of production and Agriculture and climate change must integrate the food sovereignty issue, protect rural livelihoods and establish right to food. Other issues discussed at length in the Consultation include the need to promote traditional food culture, protest against capitalist culture and promote humanitarian values and launch campaign against land grabbing. The need to mobilize people at grassroots level to generate awareness among masses was agreed upon by all the participants. Also the need of developing effective dialogues with policy makers & multi stakeholders was debated.

Finally Food Sovereignty Network Sri Lanka was formed and a Core committee was also formed following the creation of FSN Sri Lanka for supervising follow up process. FSNSA expressed its solidarity to FSN Sri Lanka in the hope that this creation is just a way ahead towards achieving food security of the people at large and promoting the notion of Food Sovereignty further among masses.

### **International Fact Finding Mission visits Kalpitiya Islands**

Placed 150 km north of the capital, Colombo, the Kalpitiya region is one of the most beautiful coastal areas located in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Kalpitiya is a peninsular that separates the Puttalam lagoon from the Indian Ocean and is a marine sanctuary with a diversity of habitats ranging from bar reefs, flat coastal plains, salt pans, mangroves



swamps, salt marshes and vast sand dune beaches. Given the investment opportunities available, in 2008 the Sri Lanka Tourism launched the Kalpitiya Dutch Bay Resort Development Project.



An International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) with members from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand visited Kalpitiya islands from the 23rd to the 27th of February, 2011 with the objective of studying the ramifications of the Kalpitiya Integrated Tourism Resort Project. During its visit, the IFFM met with representatives of state departments, religious institutions and civil society, political leaders and members of the affected communities. The main contact groups for the IFFM were the Food Sovereignty Network of South Asia (FSNSA), NAFSO (Sri Lanka), Praja Abhilasha Network (Sri Lanka) and IMSE (India).

#### **Observation of IFFM team:**

The project today is adversely affecting the livelihoods of the people and will surely have a negative impact on their social and cultural realities as well. Already, the project has caused some land alienation resulting in considerable restrictions on people's access to sea, fishing and other activities. Entire communities face an imminent threat of displacement which appears to be already under way. The



process is suffering from a comprehensive absence of precise and timely information for communities. While a study of the environmental impact of the project has been (EIA) has been done, no such study on its socio-cultural and economic impact has been conducted. Even the EIA report was not available in the public domain in a timely fashion. There is a groundswell of resentment and resistance against the project. However, resistance has been weak so far due to lack of information, coordination and apprehensions of reprisal by the state.

#### **In light of the above observations, the IFFM recommends the following:**

- The project must be stopped with immediate effect and a review carried out. A National Commission must be set up to conduct the said review. The review should respect the social, economic, cultural and political rights of the people and emphasize information flow, transparency and participation thereby ensuring accountability on the state's part.
- To address the issue of land alienation, legal land titles should be given.

- People's livelihoods must not be disturbed on any account. Necessary measures to ensure this, such as unimpeded access to the coast and sea, must be taken.
- Food sovereignty must be recognized as a fundamental right not to be compromised in the name of development.

### **National consultation on Food Sovereignty held at Nepal**

A national consultation on Food Sovereignty was organized on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2011 in Nepal and supported by FSNSA.

Com Bamdev Gautam, President of ANPFa and Ex-Deputy P.M of Nepal inaugurated the Consultation. Shri Biplab Halim and Ms. Ujjaini Halim attended the Consultation representing FSNSA, India. Mr. Hari Parujuli, Mr. Balram Banskota and Mr. Prem Dangal of ANPFa also participated in the Consultation. Several NGO and CSO representatives from all over the country participated in the Consultation.



The objective of the Consultation was to discuss the notion of food sovereignty and its relevance in present times in Nepal. Nepal has recognized Food Sovereignty in its constitution but it is high time to discuss how to operationalize it through policies and practices.

In the program, Shri Biplab Halim, shared his experience of formation of Food Sovereignty Network in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and the facilitating role of FSNSA in that process. Shri Birendra Adhikari (Coordinator-RtF, Nepal), Shri Ganga Acharya (FIAN, Nepal), Ms.Sushila Thapa (Care, Nepal) were few of the other participants who shared their contributing ideas in the program. Mr.Zafar Hussain Sangi of Pakistan attended the Consultation as a guest observer.

In this national meeting status regarding agrarian reform in Nepal to empower poor with access to natural resources was debated. Other important issues that were discussed in the Consultation includes alarming hike in food prices and its impact on poor people, impact of climate change on Nepal and its people, development induced displacement, how political and economic policies of developed nations shape food security situation in smaller countries and need of better cooperation at SA level. The necessity of carrying out activities like formulation of a concrete plan of action for case studies & campaigns as well as with other interventions like Public Hearing needs was argued.

At the end of the day it was decided that a platform of NGOs/CSOs/CBOs and political groups would be formed as Food Sovereignty Network, Nepal. Mr. Prem Dangal, General Secretary of ANPFa and Balram Banskota, Deputy General Secretary of ANPFa supported the decision. All the organizations present in the gathering were the member of the network where as the secretariat of the network.

### **Regional training workshop held at Nepal**

A regional training workshop on VGRF, ICARRD & MDG 1 was organized by FSNSA & ANPFa at Kathmandu from 17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup>, March 2011. Honorable Chairperson of ANPFa,

Com. Bamdev Gautam inaugurated the program. The workshop was attended by Shri Biplab Halim, Dr. Ujjaini Halim from FSNSA, Ms. Sarita Minz, and Ms. Mona Patel from India, Mr. Zafar Hussain Sangi and Mr. Murad Khan from Pakistan and Ms. Rahela Rabbani and Mr. Rafiqul Islam from Bangladesh. Clare Westhood and Morana Leffliatre were invited as observer guest in this workshop. The grand gathering was attended by almost all national level organizations working on right to food and agrarian issues in Nepal.

Com Bamdev Gautam in his speech mentioned about the need for developing better policy for realizing food sovereignty and empowering peoples' movement to achieve genuine agrarian reform. He welcomed the initiative of FSNSA to organize such awareness workshops on international human rights instruments.

On behalf of FSNSA Dr. Ujjaini Halim gave a presentation on VGRF, ICARRD Guidelines where she spoke about the genesis as well as the need for adopting these international human rights guidelines in order to ensure food security of the masses.

During open discussion participants shared country experiences regarding status of food security and hunger situation and discussed how they could use VGRF, ICARRD guidelines in their country for ensuring better governance and food security.

Ms Meena Bigli of WOCAN attended the workshop as guest resource person and delivered an interesting lecture on how to empower women to enable them attain food security.

Participants from Bangladesh mentioned the pressing issues in their country include non implementation of Genuine Agrarian Reforms, forceful land grabbing, development stimulated displacement, lack of land rights of women and indigenous people.

Participants from Sri Lanka identified development induced displacement, industrial agriculture hampering food security, Government's lack of interest in implementing genuine agrarian reform as major problems.

Pakistan has semi feudal agrarian system. Foremost among Pakistan's problems include militarization and forceful land grabbing. Land rights of women and poor peasants have been affected tremendously post disaster (flood).

Mona Patel of India spoke about limited land rights of pastoralists. She said right to food goes beyond ensuring food security and right to food could be ensured if people have access to land and other natural resources. To uphold the notion of food sovereignty advocacy and lobby work needs to be undertaken and VGRF and ICARRD Guidelines should be adopted. Sarita Minz of India spoke about need for investing in agriculture so that agriculture can create job opportunities for jobless youth of our country.

All the participants unanimously stressed upon the need of adopting international human rights instruments like VGRF, ICARRD to ensure food security and promote food sovereignty.

FIAN Nepal Vice president Ms. Basudha Gurung mentioned the right to food does not only focus on the access to food, but also implies the access to productive or income generating resources. Other participants from Nepal stressed the necessity of adopting

the VGRF Guidelines should be adopted as a tool is to support the progressive realization of the right to food.

The workshop resulted in adoption of concrete plan of action like organizing awareness generation programmes, information dissemination, sensitizing state actors as well translating VGRF and ICARRD guidelines in local languages.

### **Forthcoming activities**

FSNSA is successfully promoting notion of food sovereignty for the past two years. The subsequent key activities would be undertaken by FSNSA in the coming months:-

1. ***Research on Land Governance :-***

The study will present a critical analysis of land governance in South Asia with a focus on emerging trends, substantiated by case examples particularly on specific trends like gender and land rights, indigenous women's right to land, disaster and land rights from different South Asian countries. The study will suggest robust policy recommendations for formations/revision of policies and will try to sensitize policy makers for adopting appropriate policies for pro-poor land governance.

2. ***Regional Media Workshop on Food Sovereignty for sensitization***

3. ***Second Regional Training workshop on VGRF, ICARRD***

4. ***Publication of cases on land grabbing in South Asia***

FSNSA would be pleased to receive comments/ feedback from its readers. To share your valuable comments write to us at [foodsovsouthasia@gmail.com](mailto:foodsovsouthasia@gmail.com)