

Description:

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change and sea level rise. Flooding due to tropical cyclones constitute a devastating hazard through storm surges and accompanying water logging and salinity. For example, in 2007, Cyclone Sidr, caused 3500 deaths and in 2009 Cyclone Aila, destroyed homes and inundated the land of southern Bangladesh with salt water. The coastal areas of Bangladesh comprise low-lying and poorly protected land which supports a large population. The majority of this population are poor and dependent on agriculture, and are thus more vulnerable to tropical cyclones, storm surges, floods, and droughts. For example, in 2004 severe floods destroyed over three quarters of food crops, and left 10 million people homeless. There is also a desertification process occurring in the northern districts of the country. Finally, the coping capacity in Bangladesh remains limited due to the relatively poor physical infrastructure.

These trends were confirmed by the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (peasant farmer's organisation, BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (peasant women's organization, BKS) who organized 31 workshops in different parts of Bangladesh from 17th December 2009 to 27th January 2010. Those workshops were organized to assess the impact of climate change. Peasant communities commented on the increasing length of hot dry periods; decreasing water table levels; increased incidence of flooding; changes in weather (such as cold periods and fogs) causing failure of crops; increased cyclone activity and high tidal inundation causing salination of rivers and soil; and changes in the frequency and character of the Monsoon disrupting traditional farming practices.

Further, the impacts of climate change are felt most strongly by women, who already face gender discrimination for example through insecure rights to land. Amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized people in Bangladesh, women have the least capacity or opportunity to prepare for the impacts of a changing climate or to participate in negotiations on mitigation. They have less access to vital information on climate change mitigation or adaptation strategies, not least because they are too busy with child caring and other domestic responsibilities. Drought and water salinization seriously impact women who are responsible for water collection and who frequently must travel long distances to find water. Heavy rainfall and more frequent floods increase women's

workloads, as they have to devote more time to collecting water and to cleaning and maintaining their houses after flooding.

Climate change threatens the food security of peasants that has already been undermined by issues such as unequal land distribution (especially landlessness); the lack of credit; and land grabbing by corporate and state interests and corrupt local officials, which displace the poor from their means of survival. As a result, there is an urgent need for both education concerning climate change and gender amongst the peasant population, and mobilisation of the population around key issues such as access to land and food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty has been recognised by peasant communities and movements as one of the most important practices that enable peasant communities to both mitigate, and adapt to, the effects of climate change. Food sovereignty implies control over territory and biodiversity; self-governance; and ecological sustainability and has acted as a point of encounter, common interest and solidarity. As a result, the BKF has been actively involved in the international farmer's network, La Via Campesina (LVC), whose opposition to dominant responses to climate change has combined a commitment to the importance of localized forms of agriculture, and food sovereignty. Important here are ideas of agroecology concerned with the productivity, stability, sustainability and equitability of agricultural systems, frequently utilising indigenous systems of agricultural knowledge.

The BKF and BKS are planning to organise a Climate Change, Gender and Food Sovereignty Caravan during late 2011, in order to begin to address these pressing issues, and seeks funding in order to support such an important initiative. Representatives from the BKF participated in the 'Trade and Climate Change' caravan that preceded the COP15 mobilisations in Copenhagen in 2009 and also participated in those mobilisations as a member of LVC.