



Workshop Report

“STRENGTHENING THE CSO’S NETWORK IN ASIA AND WOMEN FARMER’S ROLE IN MITIGATING LAND DEGRADATION”



ORGANIZED BY: DEVELOPMENT WHEEL (DEW) IN A COLLABORATION WITH CHINA GREEN FOUNDATION AND GRAM BHARATI SAMITI (GBS), INDIA

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Executive summary

Globally, land degradation has become a concerning issue for ensuring food and soil security. It has become a serious issue that affects the lives and livelihoods of the south Asian countries. Developing countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, China, and Nepal are predominantly agriculture-based economy. In Bangladesh, land degradation is also considered a major concern as it has significant impacts on the economy, agriculture, and livelihoods of millions of people. The problem of land degradation in Bangladesh is complex and multifaceted. It is caused by a combination of factors such as deforestation, soil erosion, overgrazing, the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and climate change. These factors have led to a decline in soil fertility, loss of biodiversity, and reduced agricultural productivity. The consequences of land degradation are far-reaching and can be devastating for communities that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods of the country. It is high time to take a cooperative approach to take the matter under consideration and should take necessary steps to combat the livelihood-threatening issue from India, Bangladesh, and China.

Development Wheel, a non-profit organization organized a knowledge and experience-sharing workshop supported by UNCCD, in a close collaboration with China Green Foundation and Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), India. The workshop was organized including a field trip for the women farmers to build their capacity and to disseminate knowledge on land degradation situation and its devastating impact. The workshop also engaged govt. an official of Bangladesh, experts from neighboring countries India and China to create a scope of strengthening Asian CSO's network to combat the land degradation in South Asia through a collaborative approach. The event was participated by more than 30 women farmers from the north east part of Bangladesh.

Govt. officials and international experts have commented that regulations are crucial to deal with the risks of desertification. According to them, Land degradation in South Asia including Bangladesh has a devastating impact on the livelihoods of people and it is high time to act upon. For this purpose, Land degradation neutrality should be a top policy goal for every nation in South Asia, especially India, China, and Bangladesh.

Introduction

Land degradation is the gradual deterioration of the quality and productivity of the soil due to natural or human-induced factors such as deforestation, overgrazing, and excessive use of chemicals. It is a complex problem that requires urgent attention from all stakeholders. The consequences of not addressing this issue can be catastrophic for the region's food security, water resources, and biodiversity.

Land degradation is a serious issue affecting many countries in South Asia, including India, Bangladesh, and China. It is caused by a combination of factors. The effects of land degradation can have significant impacts on the environment, economy, and society. One of the major consequences of land degradation is reduced agricultural productivity. This can lead to food insecurity, which is already a pressing issue in many parts of South Asia. In addition, land degradation can also contribute to climate change by releasing carbon into the atmosphere and reducing the ability of land to absorb carbon dioxide. India, Bangladesh, and China have all implemented various approaches to combat land degradation.

The government has launched several programs in India, such as the National Afforestation Program and the National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas. These programs focus on afforestation, soil conservation, and water management. However, implementation of these programs has been slow due to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of community participation.

In Bangladesh, the government has implemented the Hillside Agriculture Development Project which focuses on soil and water conservation practices. Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in promoting sustainable agriculture and raising awareness about the importance of soil conservation. However, despite these efforts,



Participants at the knowledge and experience sharing workshop.

land degradation remains a serious issue in Bangladesh.

In China, the government has implemented the Sloping Land Conversion Program which aims to convert steeply sloping farmland into forest or grassland. This program has been successful in reducing soil erosion and increasing vegetation cover. However, it has also led to the displacement of farmers and loss of agricultural land.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) efforts in China, India, and Bangladesh have made significant strides in minimizing land degradation. By implementing successful initiatives such as reforestation, soil conservation, and sustainable agriculture, these countries have shown that it is possible to preserve the environment while also improving human livelihoods.

However, there is still much work to be done. Climate change continues to pose a threat to our planet, and it is up to all of us to take action. By supporting the UNCCD and its efforts to combat land degradation, A collaborative approach can make a difference and create a better future for ourselves and generations to come.

Objectives of the workshop

- To share knowledge and experience on LDN in China, India, and Bangladesh perspective which will help small women farmers in agriculture to combat land degradation for improving farm productivity and enhancing productivity.
- Strengthening Asian CSO's network through collaborative activities

Speakers

- Tahmina Yeasmin, Additional Deputy Director, Department of Agricultural Extension, Govt. of people republic of Bangladesh.
- Kusum Lata Jain, Secretary, Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), India.
- Mr. Cong, Wang, China Green Foundation, China.
- Shah Abdus Salam, Executive, Director, Development Wheel (DEW)
- Shanti Pada Saha, Manager Finance and Admin, Development Wheel (DEW)
- Subhatun Nur Prithy, Program officer , Developmet Wheel (DEW)

Day 1

Workshop Sessions:

Mr. Shah Abdus Salam formally started the workshop by offering thanks to CSO panel UNCCD for approving the project. He also expressed gratitude to UNCCD for support in organizing such kind of workshop. He also thanked Gram Bharati Samiti, India and China Green Foundation for the collaboration and joining the workshop. He also thanked all the participants for attending. After that he gave an introduction of all the guests and speakers. He also shared a brief about the purpose of the workshop. Then he requested our chief guest Additional Deputy Director, Department of Agricultural Extension, Tahmina Yeasmin to formally inaugurate the workshop. Before going to the main event Mr. Shah invite everyone to observe a minute's silence as a tribute to Mr. Bhawani Shankar Kusum founder Gram Bharati Samiti, India for his lifetime efforts towards humanity and environment.



Everyone during observing a minute's silence as a tribute to Mr. Bhawani Shankar Kusum

Additional Deputy Director, Tahmina Yeasmin, formally inaugurated the event and thanked DEW for inviting her. She expressed her concern about the land degradation situation in Bangladesh. She shared her experience with land degradation issues such as the high rate of soil fertility reduction in Bangladesh. She also shared that the government of Bangladesh has already recognized the severity of land degradation and has taken several initiatives to address the issue. Different ministries and national international NGOs working together to prevent the issue. She also added that UNCCD recognizes the severity of land degradation in Bangladesh and has taken a strong stance by collaborating with the Govt. on addressing and solving this issue. As part of their efforts, they have collaborated with the government of Bangladesh to implement sustainable land management practices and promote reforestation initiatives. There is a need of developing the skills, knowledge, resources, and technical support to implement sustainable land management practices. A collaborative approach is essential for drawing effective results. She also emphasized Promoting sustainable land use practices and the use of organic fertilizers and integrated pest management techniques.



Additional Deputy Director, Tahmina Yeasmin during inauguration

After the session **Subhatun Nur Prithy, Program officer DEW** shared a brief presentation on the land degradation situation in Bangladesh. She started with visualizing the basics of land degradation, its severity in Bangladesh, its cause and impacts. She also shared that, Around 11.07 million hectares of land, which accounts for 75 percent of the country's geographical area, is suffering soil nutrient depletion. She also added that Bangladesh is losing agricultural land at a rate of nearly 1% per year and it is high time to act to solve the issue. Through her presentation she also visualized the positions of UNCCD, Bangladesh Govt., and NGOs in Bangladesh. She finally ended the slides by giving few recommendations to combat the land degradation of South Asia through a collaborative



Subhatun Nur Prithy, Program officer DEW sharing a brief presentation

approach. She emphasized the capacity-building training for the local farmers, especially the women who are actively involved in agricultural activities. She also urged for an effective policy for every South Asian nation especially India, China and Bangladesh.

Mr. Shah Abdus Salam, Executive Director, DEW shared a brief presentation on the Development Wheel and highlighted its activity regarding minimizing climate and environmental issues. He shared, that DEW has been working since 1996, to ensure livelihood security to the marginalized community. He also shared that DEW works for ensuring human rights, good governance, and sustainable livelihood. It also



Mr. Shah Abdus Salam, Executive Director, DEW sharing a brief presentation about the Development Wheel

promotes arts and crafts through social enterprises. He also visualized a few achievements of the development wheel in ensuring food security, promoting digital literacy programs for small farmers, forming self-help group and farmers association in district and regional level, capacity building in organic fertilizer production for produce safer food, providing soil test facility to identify the root cause. Dew also created marketing channel for the local farmers to increase their sells, also organize different awareness programs to ensure gender equity, women empowerment and developing climate-resilient communities through extensive research.

Kusum Lata Jain, GBS, India Proposed action points to strengthen Asia's NGOs and women farmers' network, LDN. She highlighted the efforts of Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), in reducing the desertification of the area. She added how successfully they able to decreased water scarcity, increased soil fertility of arable land, forests, and biodiversity in the project area. She also added how they enhanced livelihoods and developed pasture areas. She also shared a Case study of



Kusum Lata Jain, GBS, India sharing her insights in the workshop

Gandhivan, an environment Prototype: 3 Decades of productive efforts by GBS. Through her presentation she described the main causes of land degradation, LDN and women in India, how

women are contributing in achieving LDN goals by practicing different technologies with the support of GBS. She visualized few pictures of dramatic achievements they gained in reducing soil desertification, their tree plantation program. She ended the speech by giving few recommendation to prevent the land degradation and desertification. She purposed that Exchange of knowledge and good practice is crucial to combat land issues from our countries such as India, China, and Bangladesh. Field and exposure visits will provide a broader sense to the farmers of the selected countries about the technologies that are using beyond the borders.

Mr. Cong, Wang, China Green Foundation introduced of Million Forest Projects to show how the project is contributing in changing the life and livelihood of the local women farmers in China. He also shared how the project is working for 14 years and expected to continue more as it is playing an active role in produce greenery in desert. He added, that China Green Foundation's activities to support women farmers in preventing desertification and land degradation. He said the project is working for promoting the development of the local community through developing environmental education, by adopting different technologies like planting shifting-sand control forest, by developing eco-tourism in the desert and by creating online sales channels for local agricultural products. He also shared how technology can help in breaking down information barriers and can play a vital role in empowering women farmers. He expressed that the foundation is optimistic about taking a collaborative approach to combat the land degradation in the three partnering countries.



Q & A Session

During this session participants, women farmers are requested to ask about the issues they face regarding land degradation and their queries regarding the presentations and the speech delivered. One participant requested to provide capacity-building training on sustainable agriculture farming. She expressed her concern regarding reduced production from her land due to the reduction of soil fertility. Another participant shared her interest in growing organic



Q & A Session

fertilizer and insecticides. Some of them asked for an agriculture education program to develop their skill. All of them expressed their interest in playing an active part in combating land degradation and urged for financial and technical support. They also shared few intervention of DEW that has brought a change to their life and livelihood. Some of them expressed their concern about the changing pattern of the environment and soil and requested for capacity building trainings that will help them to

adopt knowledge and new techniques to cope with it.

Closing Remark



Mr. Shah giving Closing Remark

Mr. Shah, executive director of DEW delivered his remark on closing the workshop. He said it is high time to address the issue of land degradation in South Asia especially in Bangladesh to ensure sustainable economic growth. Need of the time is a structured initiative to protect Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) through building the capacity of farmers especially women involved in farming. Also need to establish cooperation among the Asia region to share and exchange knowledge

and experience among farmer communities and for development practitioners to achieve SDG goals 2030 and leave no one behind to achieve the goals.

Day 2

FGD's in the field to find out LDN situation in Bangladesh



Group Photo after the FGD session



Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion

The next day a field trip including a focus group discussion was held at Village: Anondipur, Upazila: Sadar, and dist.: Mymensingh on 22nd September, 2023. Kusum Lata Jain, Secretary, Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), Mr. Cong, Wang, China Green Foundation, China, Shah Abdus Salam, Executive, Director, Development Wheel (DEW), Subhatun Nur Prithy, Program officer , Development Wheel (DEW) joined the field trip. Our participants' women farmers actively attend the field focus group discussion.

During the focus group discussion, participants shared their concerns about the effects of land degradation on their communities. Many expressed worry about the loss of soil fertility and the impact on agriculture, which is a major source of income for many families.

One participant shared a personal story about how land degradation had affected their family's farm, leading to decreased crop yields and financial hardship. This highlighted the real-world impact that land degradation can have on individuals and communities. Others seek technical help and urge to launch any agriculture education and training program to minimize the impact of reduced soil fertility. One of them suggested us to create a women's group and provide instrumental support and other capacity-building support. Some of them asked for a scope of exchange visit to the partnering countries for practical experience. They add, as the three

countries are walking in the same way to combat land degradation, this type of exchange visit can enhance their knowledge through practical experience.

Overall, the focus group discussion emphasized the urgent need for action to address land degradation and protect our planet's natural resources.

Field Visit

After the focus group discussion, local women farmers took us to visit their land which helped us to observe firsthand the effects of land degradation on the environment. As it was rainy season no remarkable barren wastelands is not seen. However, the farmers were sharing their experience of reduction of crop production as a result of reduced soil fertility. During our visit, we noticed villagers indiscriminately cutting trees for selling which is a concerning issue. Many places were heavily polluted with plastic waste and other debris. This pollution not only affects the aquatic ecosystem but also poses a significant threat to human health. It was disheartening to see how human activities have caused irreparable damage to the soil and environment.



Findings of the Workshop

After a long workshop, focus group discussion, and field trip the knowledge and experience-sharing workshop identified a few major areas to collaborate both three organizations based on their long and significant experience in combating land degradation in India, China, and Bangladesh.

A collaborative approach can be an effective one to combat land degradation in India, China, and Bangladesh.

- A multi-faceted strategy that addresses the root causes of this problem in the areas is required.
- Working with local communities to promote sustainable land management practices that are tailored to the unique needs of each region is an urgent need.
- Capacity-building training programs to educate the local women farmers to adopt techniques to reduce land degradation are demanded by the women farmers.
- Agriculture education camp where exchange visits can be facilitated for the local farmers to have practical experience of the partnering countries also requested from the farmers end.
- A replicable training module for capacity building training that can be used for similar training in both three countries.
- Engaging young women farmers to lead the groups of beneficiary farmers is crucial for the sustainability of the work.
- Measures such as reforestation, soil conservation, and crop diversification is recommended.
- Awareness program to prevent deforestation, excessive irrigation, and plastic pollution is important
- Providing tools/equipment to the farmer group to encourage them to continue their environment-friendly crop production approach such as organic fertilizer and pesticide preparation can add value to the work.
- Engage with policymakers at the national and international levels to create policies that incentivize sustainable land management practices and discourage harmful activities such as deforestation and overgrazing in India, China, and Bangladesh. By working together, we will be able to create a regulatory framework that supports long-term environmental sustainability while also promoting economic growth and social development.

Action need to be taken:

- Develop a multi country development project for women farmers on LDN in South Asia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen how land degradation is a significant problem in India, Bangladesh and China. The current approaches being used to combat this issue have their strengths and weaknesses, but a collaborative approach is necessary to achieve sustainable results.

Our proposed collaborative approach involves working together across borders and sectors, sharing knowledge and resources to restore degraded lands and improve the livelihoods of local communities. By taking action now, we can prevent further degradation and ensure a more sustainable future for generations to come.
