

# A Campaign Report on SAARC Food Bank

## 1. Background

The need of a food reserve was felt by the SAARC nations more than 22 years ago. The first step of this endeavor was the agreement on establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve which came into force on 12 August 1988. Considering the view SAARC countries agreed to develop a food reserve entitled “SAARC Food Bank (SFB)” with two major objectives;

- a) to act as a regional food security reserve for the SAARC member countries during normal times, food shortages and emergencies; and
- b) to provide regional support to national food security efforts, foster inter-country partnerships and regional integration, and tackle regional food shortages through collective action.

Other hidden provisions of the agreement include reserve of food grains (rice and wheat), quality of the reserve, withdrawal of food grains, procedures for the release of food grains from the reserve, replenishment of the reserve, procedures for the withdrawal of food grains by a member country from its own share of the reserve, determination of price, institutional arrangements, and functions of the food bank board. The prices, and terms and conditions of payment in respect of the food grains would be subject of direct negotiation between the concerned member countries based on guidelines for price determination to be approved by the food bank board. Under the agreement, the food bank has been authorised to start functioning with a total reserve of 241,580 tons of food grains, of which India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives are to contribute 153,000 tons, 40,000 tons, 40,000 tons, 4,000 tons, 4,000 tons, 1,420 tons, 200 tons and 180 tons respectively. But the SFB is not yet able to reserve adequate food grains to ensure regional food security.



In order to overcome the inadequacies of the reserve and to improve its functioning, the leaders of the SAARC met at Dhaka during 27-28 Oct'10 to reiterate their commitment for early establishment of the Bank. The 4th Board Meeting of the SFB was a follow-up of the previous three meetings.

## 1. Rationale of the campaign

By realizing the appropriate time, Equity and Justice Working Group (Equitybd), a country thematic focal organization (food sovereignty, climate change, livelihood and employment) of Bangladesh thought it is important to raise the demands in front of the SAARC leaders

just before the SFB board meeting. Taking it in the view, Equitybd discussed the issues with its like-minded activists and CSOs leaders and finally took the decision to organize the campaign during the SFB board meeting, Dhaka. Equithbd also found that although the SFB established since long time but not operationalized objectively because a lot of unsolved issues yet exist among the SAARC countries. Equitybd believed that this campaign will sensitize the SAARC leaders to come out in a common decision which will help to operationalize of the SFB appropriately.

## **2. Groups involved with this campaign**

Agriculture Reporters Forum, EquityBD, Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Coastal Development Partnership, Nagorik Uddouge, and Media Foundation for Trade and Development were involved with this campaign very actively wherein Equitybd was the key facilitator to make the campaign successful.

## **4. Events organized during SFB's 4<sup>th</sup> Board meeting**

### **4.1 National Seminar**

The group in association with Agriculture Reporters Forum, EquityBD, Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Coastal Development Partnership, Nagorik Uddouge, and Media Foundation for Trade and Development organized a seminar on 26 October 2010, title “SAARC Food Bank and South Asian Hungry People” held at National Press Club wherein Food and Disaster Management Minister Dr. Abdur Razzaque MP was present as chief guest. Among others Ex Agriculture Minister and BNP Leader M K Anwar, Chairman Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture Shawkat Momen Sahajahan MP, Dr.Asaduzzaman of BIDS, Golam Mortoza of Shaptahik, Rashed Al Titumir of Unnayan Anneshan, Elahi Dad Khan of Bangladesh Nodal Piont for SAARC Food Bank, and Debayoni Baus of IMSE India were participated. The seminar was moderated by Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, chief moderator of Equitybd and key note paper jointly presented by Dr Sohel Iqbal, Altab Hossain, and Faroque Ahmed.



The seminar have raised four specific recommendations to make a functional food bank, these are food reserve have to be raised at least 1 million metric tons, four step tiers in between food bank to council of ministers have to reduced, price have to be settled as half of the international market price, and there should be SAARC agriculture perspective 2020 and SAARC food security plan have to be prepared in participatory way.

### **4.2 Human chain and rally**

In the same way, the group headed by Equitybd organized a human chain and rally in front of national press club dated 27<sup>th</sup> Oct'10. Agriculture Reporters Forum, Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Coastal Development Partnership, and Nagorik Uddogoe, Media Foundation for Trade and Development and South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) have shown their solidarity through participating and speaking in the human chain and rally.

The organizer demanded unity to uphold South Asian Regionalism and to ensure Right to Food of South Asian hungry people. The rally was moderated by Mostafa Kamal Akanda of EquityBD, was spoken by, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of SAAPE, Zaid Iqbal Khan and Mohiuddin Howlader Mohin of Krishok Federation, Fazlur Rahman a farmer from Baraguna, Dr. Sohel Iqbal from COAST and Debayoni Basu from IMSE.

The rally participants being carried out banners with different written slogans, as written



- SAARC food bank should have response during food crisis;
- No to profit making corporation business on food, South Asian foods for South Asian hungry people,
- Big countries / economics must consider responsible act to the small

countries / economics in South Asia.

- SAARC leaders must promote Global Food Bank and International Court on Food Justice.

#### 4.3 E-news letter

Just after the campaign, Equitybd prepared an e-newsletter covering the mentioned two events organized in national level. The newsletter issued to several groups mail like; media@equitybd, bd\_civic@equitybd, int\_civic@equitybd, jsmembers@yahoo.com, agrapothik@yahoo.com, etc. to keep informed the issues globally.

#### 5. Media Coverage

Important media (both electronic and print) has been covered the event rightly. They have series report on this issue during the SFB 4<sup>th</sup> board meeting. More than 22 print media in Bangladesh especially; The Daily Star, New Age, The Daily Sun, Protham Alo, Shamakal etc. published the news that has drawn attention of the respective policy makers.

#### 6. Achievement of the Campaign

Before the 4<sup>th</sup> board meeting of SFB, the organizer placed their specific demand/recommendations through organizing a national seminar wherein respective minister, public official and stakeholders were participated. We put the demands of CSOs on SFB in right

place timely. A part from this, almost all prominent media broadcast this news rightly to draw attention of the relevant parties to make the SFB operationalize. Although since a long time SFB established but mass people don't informed about this SFB. We do believe that thus events were the steps to create a sense on SFB nationally.

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