

# Bangladesh Land Rights Network: Securing Land Rights Through Social Inclusion

Securing land rights is the key to end poverty and build peaceful and just societies. However, land governance is complex and deeply rooted in unequal power relations. To those working to secure land rights, it is clear that this cannot be addressed in isolation. That is why the International Land Coalition (ILC) has been building and strengthening partnerships based on trust to solve land governance challenges. National Engagement Strategies - "NES" – are multi-stakeholder platforms led by national actors that simplify and unpack land governance complexities, using ILC's 10 commitments to people-centred land governance as their compass, while promoting the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure (VGGT).

The NES Bangladesh platform has initiated a campaign, the **Bangladesh Land Rights Network (BLRN)**, which seeks to engage diverse actors and interests to **secure land rights through social inclusion for poor, landless, and marginalised communities, as well as indigenous peoples and minorities.** Given the complexity and politically sensitive nature of land governance, this is crucial to persuade like-minded actors to build momentum together and hold duty-bearers accountable.

Based on **collaboration and evidence-based policy dialogue**, the BLRN set priorities and designed legitimate solutions to the most challenging land-related issues in the country. The BLRN, which was formed in 2014, includes ILC members and non-members and aims at **bridging the gap between** national and local government, international agencies such as UNDP, civil society actors, as well as peasants and peoples' organisations, providing a space to share knowledge and complement each other to improve land governance.

BLRN is interested in exploring together how donor institutions and strategic partners can engage in this partnership between civil society and government to complement and link our efforts to reach the **Sustainable Development Goals** by securing land rights.



## Major land governance challenges in Bangladesh

With an estimated population of

**160 million**  
distributed over  
**150,000<sup>2</sup>/km**



Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.



The pressure on land is hence tremendous. This is further exacerbated by a history of absence of comprehensive land reforms in the country which has resulted in a huge disparity in land ownership. Land ownership is extremely concentrated, roughly 20 percent of the population own 80 percent of land in the country, and a vast number of citizens are functionally landless. The 2019 agricultural census reveals that out of 35,533,180 households, 4,024,189 family households are absolute landless while 9,100,000 agricultural labourers cultivate the land owned by others as tenants or sharecroppers.

While the recent economic advancements of Bangladesh have contributed to a reduction in poverty, they have also exacerbated the fragile balance between land and people, resulting in an increased urbanization and demand for land dedicated to industrial development.



In addition, despite the gradual poverty reduction, a number of pockets with higher rates of poverty still remain, distributed mainly amongst the country's indigenous minority population and several other marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including women and religious minorities. The lack of land ownership is a major reason for their poverty which, in the case of indigenous peoples, is worsened by non-recognition of customary tenure by the government.

The **overarching objective** of the Bangladesh Land Rights Network is to promote access to land and natural resources for poor and marginalised communities by

1. prompt and effective inclusion of dispositions to reduce or stop land, forest and water grabbing in major laws and policies
2. using the national and regional level land alliance and multi-stakeholder platform for monitoring land governance and corruption to influence and adopt specific laws, policies and programmes, including a National Action Plan (NAP) in specific support of indigenous peoples, local communities and women

#### **The priorities for the platform are to:**

- raise awareness, advocate and continue building capacity for protecting the land rights, food sovereignty, and access to justice for marginalized people
- protect land rights defenders and marginalized youth, including women
- increase legal support to the poor, indigenous people, local communities women and minorities in relation to natural resources, land deprivation and discrimination



#### **ILC Members involved:**

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Association for Realisation of Basic (ARBAN), Community Development Association (CDA), Kapaeeng Foundation, Nagorik Uddyog (NU)

#### **Other actors involved:**

Water Rights Forum (WRF), Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST), Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), International CHT Commission, Human Development Research Centre (HDRC), Caritas Bangladesh, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum (BIPF), PLAnet, Campaign for Right to Food and Social Security (RTF & SS), academics, Peasants And Peoples Organizations and other activist.

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