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Environment

Climate justice built from the grass roots

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV478 - November 2014 -

Publication date: Friday 28 November 2014

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Badrul Alam, central organiser of the Climate Justice, Gender and Food Sovereignty caravan from Bangladesh, through India and Nepal, sums up the objectives and achievements of the caravan in a speech to the People's South Asian Association for regional cooperation in Nepal on November 23. [1]

The caravan started from Dhaka, Bangladesh on November 10 2014 with 160 participants from different countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, USA, UK, Germany, Australia, Sweden and New Zealand. We arrived in Kathmandu yesterday evening. Today is the 13th day of our long overland journey. The caravan hosts include Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh Kishani Sabha, Bangladesh Adivasi Samity, Bangladesh Agricultural Farm Labor Federation, Ekattra in Bangladesh; National Hawkers Federation, Informal Sector Workers' Action Alliance and Jana Sanghati Kendra in India; All Nepal Peasants Federation in Nepal.

It is unfortunate that 17 of our participants were stuck on the Indian side of the border as they were not allowed to enter Nepal by the Indian port immigration. They made the lame excuse of that they had no Nepali visa but we all know Nepal gives port entry visa to Bangladeshi citizens. All of our delegates have their multiple entry Indian visas. So, there was no strong reasonable ground for denial.

Following the advice of the same Indian immigration authority they bought plane tickets to come to Kathmandu for joining the PSAARC but they were not allowed by the airport immigration except one person who took his visa in Australia. So the immigration pushed them into further big monetary loss as well. They went back home with bitter and painful experience of the immigration personnel. The whole situation reminded again the urgency of visa free South Asia which we have been demanding over the years.

Our caravan was for South Asia, covering three countries: Bangladesh, India and Nepal. It was a caravan on Climate Justice, Gender and Food sovereignty. The main message of the caravan was to highlight the planetary emergency which is in force. Our only living planet so far found in the whole universe, earth, is in peril due to the global climate change as well as global warming. Green House Gas (GHG) Emissions account for climate change and industrially developed countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and European countries have been emitting GHG for the last 200 years since the beginning of the industrial revolution.

So they are the major actors responsible for the global climate change. They have been doing so for their development, life-style and over-consumption. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) are playing pivotal role in Green House Gases effect on the atmosphere and the mother earth. They are doing everything for their own profit and capital. The human beings and existence of the mother earth is below their profit making target. They are just profit-mongers, nothing else. The caravan defended the declaration of the right of mother earth adopted in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2010 which recognized the living existence of the earth and the importance of its ecology.

Yet climate change has become a great concern at global level because of the continued pressure of the global resistance. The responsible countries could not help but talking on this issue. They (Annex-1 countries) even acknowledged their role in the climate crisis and made frequent commitment to cut in emission in order to keep the average temperature of the earth below 1.5 Degree Celsius. But they do not keep their commitment but continue to emit GHG. Now the average temperature of the earth is nearly 2 degrees Celsius higher than the average, which is so alarming.

Owing to the adverse impacts of climate change, the entire world is facing devastating super calamities with extreme

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weather events, like cyclones, storms, water-surges, desertification, droughts, crops failure in agriculture, rising sea level, change in season's cycles, excess heat, excess cold, excess rainfall, excess snowfall, salinity in the coastal belts, melting of concentrated glaciers in Himalayas and in both north and south pole, and so on.

During the caravan in different workshops, seminars, exchange of opinions and rallies we assessed that the food sovereignty ensured by agro-ecology is under threat in the context of global climate change. The caravan agreed on the fact that peasant-based sustainable agriculture with small scale peasants, family farmers and indigenous people can feed the world with nutritious food without causing any harm to the climate.

The caravan expressed concern about the AR-5 (Assessment Report-5) of IPCC which has given an indication of the dreadful consequences the earth will encounter unless there is no significant change in the carbon reduction level. It has predicted the disappearance of coastal countries and small island states in the world within the 21st century.

The caravan also expressed concern about the level of carbon in the atmosphere which has crossed the 'safe' level, 350 PPM. Now it has crossed even 400 PPM. It is over the tolerant level of the atmosphere which existed for millions of years, presenting an acceptable ecology for human beings. The caravan advocated keeping the carbon level in the atmosphere within 350 PPM by reducing GHG emissions.

The caravan put emphasis on the question of climate justice and gender. It clearly assessed that climate justice is the historical and ecological dues of the responsible countries and they have to pay to the global south in the form of reparation. Women are extremely and disproportionately victimized by climate change and deserved the reparation on the priority.

The caravan argues that South Asia consists of one-fifth of the world's population and the majority of the population still goes hungry and live in poverty. They have their right to reparation. Following a democratic method, the reparations should go to the people who are affected by the climate change, but have not caused it.

The caravan stressed on the question of building alternatives to climate change from below, not sitting idle. So it has emphasized adopting everywhere agro-ecological farming methods which cool the planet. It also advocated for the use of some renewable energies, namely community controlled solar power, windmills, bio-gas generation, small scale hydro power generation, effective geo-thermal power generation and many more other options instead of fossil fuel-based dirty energy which is contributing to climate change.

The caravan clearly rejected the false solutions like CDM, agro-fuels, REDD+, GMOs, carbon off-setting, smart agriculture, green economy, etc. so far proposed by the UNFCCC as answers to climate change. These will further aggravate the climate crisis. The caravan thinks that the real solutions lie in the grassroots.

60 percent of the world resources have already been used up by the TNCs. The remaining 40 percent is ocean, sea, forest, air. They are also trying to grab these resources. The caravan is strongly opposed to all types of resource grabbing including land, which is the main source of lives and livelihood of the people.

The caravan highly criticized the adoption of GE Bt. Brinjal (Eggplant) in Bangladesh whereas it is banned in India because of its negative consequences. The caravan considered GMOs unethical and they should have no future. It strongly defended the local seeds for our future, guaranteeing our food sovereignty. It underscored to protect, preserve, conserve and restore the indigenous seeds for ecological balance protection.

The caravan expressed the deep concern of the climate forced migrants which is a reality in the whole world. Their

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right as climate migrants should be protected by the framework of UNO (United Nations Organization). Presently there are 250 million climate migrants in the world and this is increasing

During the caravan there were lots of interactions, sharing and lessons learned among the participants who met thousands of people on the ground who are naturally trying to adapt to and mitigate with the climate change on their own experience. However, it does not mean that the responsible countries should continue with emissions. It is just an example of the capacity of the grassroots people.

The main objective of the caravan is to build a strong grassroots movement network in South Asia which will be a complement to the global campaign on climate justice.

The caravan urges the official SAARC to demand climate justice from the northern developed countries for the benefit of the global south. It has also demanded to strengthen the food and seed bank mechanism under SAARC for both the reduction of hunger and for the protection of rich bio-diversity and genetic resources in South Asia.

A declaration of caravan is under way. It will be submitted to the official SAARC here in Kathmandu and to the climate conference in Lima, Peru to be held next month, prioritizing the grassroots people's experiences and a proposal to the solutions to the global climate crisis.

We have had a very fruitful, productive, constructive and effective caravan in terms of outreach, and repercussions amongst the people and the caravan participants. However, still we have a long way to go and the ultimate victory is in the hands of the people. We demand system change, not climate change. We have to go hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, united.

Long live South Asia with peace, prosperity, democracy, non-communality, secularism in a visa-free region with people to people and movement to movement connectivity! Long live international solidarity! Long live South Asian regionalism! Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you all.

[1] See [Caravan for Food Sovereignty Climate and Gender Justice hits the road](#) and [Climate caravan completes its journey through India and Nepal](#) for further information