

The cover features a photograph of four women standing in a lush green field, likely a rice paddy, with a line of trees in the background. The women are wearing colorful saris and headscarves. The overall design includes a red vertical bar on the left, a purple horizontal bar across the middle, and another purple horizontal bar at the bottom containing the subtitle.

NES

**NATIONAL
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY**

LEARNING FROM NES BANGLADESH

**GOOD PRACTICES FROM A
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM**

**INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION**



NES

NATIONAL
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY

SUMMARY

NES Bangladesh is one of the key voices in support of indigenous peoples, women and the landless, poor and marginalised communities in the country. The multi-stakeholder platform has implemented effective advocacy activities also in collaboration with NGOs and grassroots organisations that are not NES members. In 2016 - as a result of its continuous **mobilisation and coordination** efforts - the NES gathered coordinated support from 21 organisations. Together they carried out **capacity building and awareness raising** campaigns - for example, on the occasion of the International women's day and the International Indigenous Peoples Day.

The NES relies on an effective **communications strategy**, based on a combined use of several connections at different levels like media houses and information dissemination through social media and newsletters.

The collective efforts of the 21 organisations have put significant pressure on the Government, pushing for an amendment of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act. The **advocacy and lobbying** work of the NES and its allies has resulted in the Government approving an amendment to this Act, which now dictates that within the Commission no decisions are valid without the approval of the majority of its members. Although the establishment of the Land Disputes Resolution Commission dates back to 2001, this Commission has never become active. Therefore, NES Bangladesh has also advocated for the activation of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission and the implementation of a Peace Accord in the area.

NES BANGLADESH GOOD PRACTICES TOWARDS MAKING LAND GOVERNANCE MORE PEOPLE-CENTRED

The **ILC's Database of Good Practices** is an initiative that documents and systematises ILC members and partners' experience in promoting people-centred land governance, as defined in the Antigua Declaration of the ILC Assembly of Members. Further information at <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/explore/our-work/>

The activity of **NES Bangladesh** supports people-centred land governance as it contributes to:

-  **COMMITMENT 1**
Respect, protect and strengthen the land rights of women and men living in poverty.
-  **COMMITMENT 2**
Ensure equitable land distribution and public investment that supports small-scale farming systems.
-  **COMMITMENT 4**
Ensure gender justice in relation to land.
-  **COMMITMENT 5**
Respect and protect the inherent land and territorial rights of indigenous peoples.
-  **COMMITMENT 7**
Ensure that processes of decision-making over land are inclusive.
-  **COMMITMENT 9**
Prevent and remedy land grabbing.
-  **COMMITMENT 10**
Respect and protect the civil and political rights of human rights defenders working on land issues.

STRATEGIC PARTERS AND CORE DONORS

On behalf of
BMZ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development



IFAD
Investing in rural people

Irish Aid
Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Sida

THE ORIGIN OF NES BANGLADESH



● NES Bangladesh started in 2012 with the objective to identify modalities of intervention and areas of work for ILC and its members and partners in Bangladesh on issues of land governance, in particular access to land and natural resources for poor and marginalised communities (read more in the Bangladesh Country Strategy 2012).

● In the first year the NES members were ALRD, ARBAN and CDA. KAPAEENG Foundation, an indigenous peoples organisation, joined the NES in the second year. Within the multi-stakeholder platform, ALRD is the focal point and as such coordinates the implementation of NES activities to support the achievement of the common goal and objectives. Indigenous peoples are a minority in Bangladesh. Most of them are concentrated in the region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), located in the south-eastern corner of the country; the rest are scattered across Bangladesh. Indigenous peoples' livelihoods and culture are strongly connected with the land they have occupied since time immemorial, although over the centuries

their customary practices have not been well protected by the State and have been challenged by the lack of legal support, land commercialisation and privatisation. IPs are amongst the most marginalised people in the country, suffering from an acute identity crisis stemming from poverty, alienation from their land and a sense of helplessness over their collective destiny. The root cause of the spate of violence in the CHT lies in the unresolved issue of non-implementation of some key aspects of the CHT Accord including that of having a functioning Land Disputes Resolution Commission. The Land Disputes Resolution Commission was established in 2001 but never functioned meaningfully in favour of Hill IPs. The indigenous communities in the plains find themselves in an even more precarious position and they continue to raise their voice demanding for the creation of a Land Commission for the Plain Lands IPs. Since its creation, NES Bangladesh has targeted the issues faced by indigenous people and other land poor and marginalised communities in the country.

● EFFECTIVE COORDINATION OF A LARGE GROUP OF ORGANISATIONS

Regular meetings for mobilisation, planning and coordination

NES members have diverse foci and areas of competence but through the NES they are well coordinated in activities and overall aims. The NES holds quarterly meetings. Every year a full-year action

plan is prepared, within which quarterly action plans are developed. Meetings have allowed the NES to 1) mobilise organisations to get involved in activities like advocacy initiatives and campaigns; 2) choose a focal person to lead the NES platform; 3) coordinate actions.

● COORDINATED ADVOCACY WORK AND CAMPAIGNING

Gathering broad support from civil society beyond the NES

The NES can rely on the support of 21 NES partner organisations (i.e. Transparency International Bangladesh - TIB, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust - BLAST, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association - BELA). The track records of NES ILC member organisations has been key to obtain this support. ALRD, CDA, ARBAN and KAPAEENG Foundation can count on a broad network of connections and expertise in advocacy and campaigning. This is instrumental to get a large number of CSOs on board in the framework of NES-sponsored initiatives.

Fact-finding, reporting and awareness raising on land grabbing

A joint platform of seven national rights-based organisations (ALRD, ASK, BELA, BLAST, Nijera Kori, TIB and Bangladesh Adivashi Forum) continuously monitors the case of land grabbing in Bangladesh. This platform has conducted ten fact finding missions between 2014 and 2016 on alleged cases of land grabbing across the country. The missions detailed out the findings in reports that were presented to the public through press conferences.

Research, dialogue and advocacy on vested property issues

Through the Vested Property Return (2nd Amendment) Act of 2013, the schedule 'kha' of vested property was repealed. ALRD with the other members of the "Arpita Sampotti Prottyarpon Ain Bastobayon Jatiyo Nagorik Somonnoy Cell" (National Citizens Coordination Cell for Vested Property Return Act Implementation) had been advocating for this since 2011. ALRD along with other 8 organisations have advocated for a speedy disposal of the applications for returning the lands listed in the 'kha' schedule of vested property. They have collected data and information on the implementation status of the Vested Property Return Act in the field through the organisation of seminars and meetings at the divisional and district levels. Simultaneously, they have arranged roundtables with the two concerned ministries - the Ministry of Land and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. Meetings also took place with other relevant actors such as judicial officers, government pleaders, land officials, lawyers and civil society members for removing barriers to the effective implementation of the Act by sharing field-level data and information.

Alternative reporting - A CSOs' alternative report was prepared against the backdrop of the submission by Bangladesh of its 8th Periodic Report to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The report was considered on 8 November 2016 at the 65th session of CEDAW in Geneva. It was submitted by a coalition of civil society organisations from Bangladesh including ILC members ALRD, ARBAN, CDA and KAPAEENG Foundation. While ALRD is a network of 220 CSOs across Bangladesh working on the issues of human rights, land rights, governance, agrarian reforms, democratic accountability and transparency, indigenous peoples' rights and grassroots mobilisation, the other three organisations are equally well-known and have their own allies and a long track record of grassroots activism and mobilisation. These four ILC members engaged NES partners in a consultation process to develop content and recommendations for the alternative report. Based on this report, advocacy efforts will continue in Bangladesh.

Providing legal support to the victims of land grabbing - NES Bangladesh also provided legal support to the survivors of land deprivation, land conflicts and land grabbing. ALRD gave legal support to 12 cases filed against 3 landless farmers' associations in 2016 in connection with land grabbing, the Vested Property Return Act and the protection of open water bodies and rivers.

Concerted efforts within the group of NES members and partners - In order to carry out effective advocacy and campaigning, the 21 organisations involved in the NES

undertake different but complementary actions contributing towards the same objective. For instance, some provide support in fact-finding missions; others engage with the media by organising and taking part in press conferences. All together they celebrated the International IPs' Day on 10 August 2016. KAPAEENG Foundation organised another big event on 9 August 2016, and ALRD, other CSOs and academics got involved. On that occasion, the platform managed to put pressure on the Government and push for an amendment of the CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act.

Important results fostering increased commitment and participation -

Thanks to the contribution and efforts of the NES group, important results were achieved. Campaigns and demonstrations were organised. For example, a token hunger strike was launched by ALRD and KAPAEENG Foundation on 9 March 2016 in Dhaka with the participation of a number of national NGO and human rights activists. A Parliamentary IP Caucus between MPs and the civil society and a series of meetings were held on the CHT issue. Capacity building and awareness raising activities have taken place through a collaboration between the NES members KAPAEENG Foundation, ARBAN, CDA and ALRD in three different regions. Three trainings and four seminars were held involving indigenous leaders and youth. Based on these actions and the continued efforts and commitment of NES members and partner organisations, NES Bangladesh is now pushing for the activation of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission, which is crucial for the resolution of land disputes in the CHT.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MEDIA

Strong presence on social media

NES Bangladesh has a very active Facebook page. The page has obtained 200+ 'likes' in just one year. The page is 'issue-based'. It mostly shares news items about the NES activities and reports of newspaper articles, as well as publications and reports from international organisations like FAO. Most followers are from Bangladesh but many others belong to Asian organisations - many of which are ILC members - wishing to learn how the same issues they are facing are being tackled in Bangladesh. There is a communications officer in charge of NES communications.

Developing a vibrant network in the media sector

The NES communications officer receives information from and provides material for news articles to the civil society. Developing a preferential channel of interaction with CSOs and CBOs and having continuous and mutually beneficial relationships with journalists is particularly useful for the multi-stakeholder platform.

A newsletter to disseminate information about NES Bangladesh

ALRD publishes a newsletter in English and Bengali. Within it, there is a specifically dedicated space for the

NES to raise awareness on the claims, priorities and activities of the platform.

Supporting advocacy through communications

Communications usefully backs NES Bangladesh advocacy efforts.



For example, when in 2015 it became known that the Government was going to set up a coal plant, which would seriously affect mangrove forests, water resources and the inhabitants of the area, the NES platform collaborated with other human rights organisations, activists, environmentalists and academics, to put pressure on the Government and stop this project. Through the NES, a collection of case studies begun as a strategy to show the possible consequences of this initiative. Relevant information was spread and used as a basis for the demos that followed.

CHALLENGES



- **Challenging political situation -**
In July 2016, the Government enacted the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act - 2016. This constrained NGOs' room for manoeuvre. The NES has tried to involve IGOs like FAO and IFAD in their activities but these are limited by the nature of their relationship with the Government of Bangladesh. It is not easy for the NES to get financial support from these organisations or INGOs.

LESSONS LEARNED

● REACHING AN AGREEMENT ON A SHARED PURPOSE WITHIN THE NES CORE GROUP

Coordinating actions within the NES

Four NES member organisations hold quarterly meetings; prepare a full-year action plan every year and quarterly action plans within it. This is key for putting in place concerted efforts and coordinated advocacy and campaigning actions.

Coordinating actions with NES -

partner organisations - NES Bangladesh relies on the support of 21 NES partner organisations. Numerous and regular meetings have been held with these organisations to mobilise them and get their support and to coordinate actions.

● NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIONAL POLICY AUTHORITIES TO INFLUENCE CHANGE TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

Personal expertise and knowledge within NES organisations

The directors of most NES member organisations have a background of progressive political movement and rely on a solid network of connections. This is crucial to guarantee a deep understanding of issues and dynamics in the sphere of land governance and strategic planning of successful interactions with national policy authorities.



Strong and effective communications to reveal injustice and raise awareness on the claims of the platform

NES Bangladesh relies on a webpage, a strong presence on social media, a newsletter and strategic relationships with important media houses and journalists.

This ensures that there is widespread awareness of the claims of the multi-stakeholder platform amongst civil society and policy makers, that injustice is exposed and that the actions that are put in place benefit from adequate visibility.



● ACHIEVING LONG-TERM LEGITIMACY FOR THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM

Developing tangible relationships within the civil society - NES member organisations are well-established and well-known at the country level and internationally, hence they managed to gather strong support from other civil society organisations around them. The platform of 21 organisations that revolves around the NES besides ILC members is based on the common objectives, collective actions and successes previously undertaken and shared by the group. It is important to invest in gathering support and coordinating actions of CSOs not only within but also beyond the NES platform.

A communications strategy to position the NES in the national land governance debate - The combined and targeted use of different tools (bilingual newsletter, presence on social media, newspaper articles etc.) was instrumental to position NES Bangladesh and make it gain legitimacy at the national level as an interlocutor for the civil society, the government and other actors.

WHAT IS NES?

In recent years, equitable access to land, particularly in rural areas, has been high on the international policy agenda and is recognised as a crucial element attributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Innovative and progressive land policies and laws, particularly at the national level, are key to determining equitable access to, use of, and control over land and other natural resources. The National Engagement Strategy (NES) is the first step of an approach being promoted by the International Land Coalition at country level, in order to create conditions for inclusive and people-centred land-related policy change. Jointly formulated and co-owned by ILC members and other relevant actors at national level, the NES itself is a framework for identifying key priority areas on which land-concerned actors see opportunities for catalysing change, either at the level of policy formulation or at the level of implementing existing progressive policies. The NES process also involves the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform that accompanies

the implementation of the NES, and makes necessary adjustments on the basis of lessons learned. A NES process is therefore aimed at facilitating collaborative and coordinated action amongst different stakeholders involved with land at the national level to promote people-centred land governance. Through these NES processes, opportunities are increasingly made available to national civil society actors to collaborate among themselves and with international actors, both governmental and non-governmental, and to engage with local and national governments.

Currently, NES exist in **Africa** (Cameroon, DRC, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda), **Asia** (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, The Philippines) **Europe** (Albania) and **Latin America** (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru).

NES are under formulation in Honduras, Jordan, Moldova, Mongolia.

This paper is based on the information shared during the NES Global Learning Workshop held in Tirana in October 2016; an interview with the former facilitator of NES Bangladesh Ripa Shanjida Khan; the **NES Bangladesh Country Strategy and the NES Bangladesh brochure**.

For more information: Ms. Rowshan Jahan Moni (NES Bangladesh focal point), email: rowshanmoni@alrd.org or Ms. Shanjida Khan Ripa (NES-Communication Officer) email: ripa@alrd.org or Mr. A.K.M. Bulbul Ahmed (member NES implementation team) email: bulbul@alrd.org.

It is produced in the framework of a collaboration between ILC and Collaborating for Resilience (CoRE) <http://coresilience.org/>

Last update: 27 January 2020.



INTERNATIONAL LAND COALITION

Secretariat at IFAD Via Paolo di Dono, 44, 00142 Rome, Italy

☎ +39 06 5459 2445 📠 +39 06 5459 3445 ✉ info@landcoalition.org

🌐 www.landcoalition.org