

## Roundtable on “Land Digitalization: Prospect for Land Equality in Bangladesh”



A roundtable discussion on “Land Digitalization: Prospect for Land Equality in Bangladesh” was held at Azimur Rahman Conference Hall of The Daily Star Bhaban on 29 April, jointly organized by Manusher Jonno Foundation, Uttaran and CARE.

With the EU's financial support, the government is implementing the project in three upazilas -- Jamalpur Sadar, Manoharpur of Rajshahi and Amtoli of Barguna. Under the project, Khas land will be recovered after a digitised land survey in the upazilas. Then the land will be given to landless people. All land owners will receive a certificate from the land office. In most countries, people get all land-related services, including that for land records and registrations, from a single office. But in Bangladesh, three offices provide the services, causing hassles to people.

Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sherif, who was present as the chief guest, said the government will go tough on land grabbers and corruption in the sector to

ensure land rights of the marginal people. He said land grabbers are very powerful, and urged the civil society and non-government organisations to extend support to the government.

Speaking as the special guest, Abdul Mannan, director general at the directorate of land records and survey, said land-related cases take years to resolve. Referring to his own experience, Mannan said his land-related case has been going on in court over the last 16 years. Indigenous people, Hindus, women, and owners of small plots of land are the worst sufferers and deprived of services at land offices.

Around 2.5 crore land-related cases remain pending with the country's courts, and it will take about 2.7 crore years to settle those if the case proceedings continue at the current pace, according to eminent economist Prof Abul Barakat. “The land issue is a highly political one. The problems will not go away even if the land digitalisation project is implemented,” Barakat, Professor of Economics at Dhaka University, said at a round-table discussion.

Philippe Jacques, head of cooperation of the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, said the land digitalization project is very crucial for Bangladesh, and they intend to expand their involvement in the land reform project.

Sanjeeb Drong, secretary general of Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People, described how indigenous people are deprived of land rights despite the government commitments to protecting their rights.

Shamsul Alam, national project director of Strengthening Access to Land and Property Rights for All Citizens of Bangladesh, presented the key features of the pilot project. The project will help protect the land rights of marginal people.

Shahidul Haque, director of Uttaran, gave a presentation on the Sustainable Access to Land Equality project that promotes digitalization of land records and survey in Bangladesh. Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, chaired the discussion.