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## **South Asia's broken food system causes failure to end hunger**

*Universal right to food must be guaranteed to ensure region's food security*

South Asian governments have largely failed in conquering hunger plaguing its population, mainly because of the broken food system that has now worsened the food security situation in the region which now has almost half of the world's hungry people, international agency Oxfam said.

"Unless the governments fix the broken food system, the region is going to face the most extreme situation of food insecurity in the near future," Cherian Mathews, Oxfam Deputy Regional Director in Asia, said.

Speaking at the regional consultation entitled, Food Justice in a Resource Constrained South Asia, Mathews said despite being agriculture-based, the region houses 40 percent of the world's hungry who are food producers yet spend most of their income on foods.

"For decades, South Asian governments have not addressed the political challenge of food distribution. The largely disempowered population is confronted with a surge of unequal distribution of food, land, and power," he said.

According to Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Executive Chairman of SAWTEE, the situation has further worsened due to the neglect of agriculture sector by South Asian governments and development partners as there have been a significant cut in agriculture budget even when productivity across the region had been steadily declining since its peak in the Green Revolution period.

"With the increasing threat of climate change and less availability of sustainable mechanisms to use natural resources, the governments must increase their agriculture investment, including in view of the need to enhance the region's adaptive capacity in agriculture and promote intra-regional trade of food and agriculture products" Dr. Pandey said. He added that the policy and institutional measures are crucial in helping the small farmers cope with the increasingly erratic, unpredictable weather which has in the past few years killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions whose livelihoods are still not fully recovered.

SAWTEE and Oxfam also urged the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to pursue reforms in areas that affect the food security of poor people, particularly women and take concrete regional actions for the promotion of fair and competitive food market and the effective operationalization of the SAARC Food Bank.

"We've already seen what the food and financial crises have done to millions of poor people. The protests ended but the impacts have remained with the prices still high compared to a few years ago. It's time South Asian governments protect the universal right to food in order to ensure nobody goes to bed hungry." Dr. Pandey said.

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*Notes to Editors:*

*1) SAWTEE, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment, is a regional network that operates through its secretariat in Kathmandu and 11 member institutions from five South Asian countries: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAWTEE's vision is to ensure fair, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable growth and development in South Asia.*

*2) Oxfam is an international confederation of 15 organizations working together in 98 countries and with partners and allies around the world to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. We work directly with communities and we seek to influence the powerful to ensure that poor people can improve their lives and livelihoods and have a say in decisions that affect them.*