Two-day event on food insecurity kicks off

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Two-day Civil Society Forum on Responding to Food Insecurity in South Asia kicked off here today.

Organised by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), a regional think-tank based in Kathmandu, and Oxfam, the forum was inaugurated by Prof Subodh Narayan Jha, National Planning Commission (NPC) member.

He said that one way to address food insecurity is to ensure that technologies are endogenous to our way to living. Right now, endogenous nature of demography and exogenous nature of technology are incompatible. Technology should be made endogenous to our way of living to address food security, he added.

Dr Posh Raj Pandey, executive chairman of SAWTEE, argued that from a long-term perspective the main challenge for South Asian countries is to formulate an actionable and doable plan to escape from the threat of food insecurity rather than just coping with food insecurity. Trade negotiations and regional consultations should be sensitive to climate change and livelihood issues of subsistence farmers, he added.

Ratnakar Adhikari, general secretary of SAWTEE, argued that due to various climatic and non-climatic events in major food producing and exporting nations, food prices have remained at high levels and volatile. "Apart from other measures such as technology transfer and addressing supply-side constraints, in South Asia, further regional integration could be a way to ensuring food security, but insurmountable trade barriers are impeding agricultural trade," he said.

The Forum is a continuation of the first Civil Society Forum, launched in Kathmandu in 2008 against the backdrop of the food crisis of 2007-08, and timed ahead of a meeting of SAARC agriculture ministers. The civil society statement on food security that emerged from the first Forum was widely appreciated and some of its recommendations were reflected in SAARC decisions.

Experts interacting at a workshop session in Kathmandu on Thursday.