

'Comprehensive rights to food law a must in South Asia'

South Asian governments must enact specialised and comprehensive law at the earliest to ensure their citizens' rights to food and to battle the region's chronic hunger that has left more than 304 people going to bed hungry every day, food security experts and policymakers from five the region have said.

Although each country has more than two dozens to hundreds of legal provisions relevant to food security, none of them directly addresses people's rights to food, they emphasised during a two-day regional consultation on food-related legislation in South Asia that concluded in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



"South Asian governments are investing a lot in terms of direct and indirect investment in food and agriculture. Many laws, rules, regulations, policies, and administrative measures have been introduced but they are not coherent and comprehensive," said Hasanul Haq Inu, Bangladesh's Information Minister and Chairperson of All Party Parliamentary Group on Food, Agriculture and Rural Development.

Lilian Mercado, Deputy Regional Director of Oxfam Asia, noted that South Asia has experienced the second fastest rate of economic growth in the world, enjoying an annual growth rate of six percent on average in the last two decades. Yet poverty has gotten worse as inequality has risen and become more severe.

"Studies show it could grow at the steady rate of around 5.5 percent in the next 25 years. But factors such as climate change, rising inequality, food price hike, population growth, rapid urbanization as well as competition for natural resources could hamper or reverse the progress. It reflects a need for South Asian governments to transform their political pledges on food security into immediate action," she said.

Similarly, Ratnakar Adhikari of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), said, "The specialized and comprehensive rights-to-food law must have clear-cut tools and measures to show strong political will. It's well known that South Asian countries perform poorly in this area so we can't ignore this any longer. The law must be implemented to be truly effective."

During the meet, some 50 representatives from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka discussed findings in the Regional Synthesis Report on food-related legislation in each of the country. Four categories of food insecurity factors were discussed including production/productivity, consumption/distribution, environment, and cooperation, along with solutions that are in line with national, regional, and international goals.

Also joining the discussion were Gagan Thapa, Nepali Congress leader and member of Committee on Natural Resources and Means of the former Constituent Assembly of Nepal; Buddika Pathirana, Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka; Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy-speaker of Nepal's former House of Representatives; Dr Somsak Pipoppinyo, Nepal Country Representative of Food and Agriculture Organization; Dr Dinesh Chandra Devkota, former Vice-Chairman of National Planning Commission of Nepal; and Hari Roka, Committee Member of Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing of Nepal's former CA. Nepalnews.com