

Policymakers push for law on people's right to food

REPUBLICA

KATHMANDU, July 31:

Governments of the South Asian countries should work to immediately enact a special and comprehensive law on rights to food in order to battle the region's prevailing and chronic hunger that leaves more than 304 people going to bed hungry each day, experts and policymakers said at a workshop that concluded here on Wednesday.

"Although each country has more than two dozens to hundreds of legal provisions related to food security, none of them directly addresses people's rights to food," said a press release issued by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) after the conclusion of two-day consultation workshop on food-related legislation in South Asia.

"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," Bangladesh's Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu said in the program, according to the release.

Despite Nepal's Interim Constitution that guarantees food sovereignty, Pakistan's Zero-Hunger Action Plan, Bangladesh's massive investment in social protection, or Sri Lanka's constitutional change, it is hard to see poor people having three meals a day, he said.

The workshop was jointly organized by SAWTEE and Oxfam.

Lilian Mercado, deputy regional director of Oxfam Asia, said the region 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," he said.

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 of the region, policymakers said in the workshop.

According to the release, about 50 representatives from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were present in the workshop.