

Experts for comprehensive law on rights to food in SA countries

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South Asia's food security experts and policymakers on Wednesday stressed immediate enacting of a specialized, comprehensive law on rights to food in the South Asian countries, to address the region's prevailing chronic hunger, reports UNB.

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 said during a two-day regional consultation on food-related legislation in South Asia held in Kathmandu, Nepal, according to a message received in Dhaka 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 Bangladesh's Information Minister and Chairperson of All Party Parliamentary Group on Food, Agriculture and Rural Development Hasanul Haq Inu.

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 have three meals everyday with existing legal loopholes and many related issues missing, he said adding that the rights to food bill in India could be an inspiration for other SA governments.

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

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

During the two-day meeting, almost 50 representatives from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka discussed the findings mentioned in the Regional Synthesis Report on food-related legislation in each of the country.

Four categories of food insecurity factors were discussed; that included production/productivity, consumption/distribution, environment, and cooperation, along with solutions that are in line with national, regional, and international goals.

Gagan Thapa, Member of Committee on Natural Resources and Means of the Farmer 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 Constituent Assembly, also spoke at the consultation.