Report of the South Asian Dialogue on the Right to Food

23–25 November 2015
Dhaka, Bangladesh
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on the Right to Food

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Authored by
Right to Food Team, FAO

Edited by
Andrew Park
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List of abbreviations and acronyms

- BISP  Benazir Income Support Programme
- CFS  Committee on World Food Security
- CoP  Community of practice
- CSM  Civil Society Mechanism
- CSOs  Civil society organizations
- FAO  Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- FSN  Food security and nutrition
- HRBA  Human rights based approach
- ICESCR  International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- PUCL  People’s Union for Civil Liberties
- SAARC  South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
- SARFC  South Asia Right to Food Conference
Opening remarks by Oxfam

Anna Wrochna, Oxfam Regional Policy and Campaign Coordinator

During her opening remarks, Anna Wrochna welcomed everyone and underlined the presence of actors from different fields of expertise as well as from four countries of the subregion: Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Participants came from governmental institutions, social movements and civil society organizations, academia, think tanks, and from Oxfam and FAO as well. While the event was initially supposed to take place in Nepal at an earlier date, the earthquake forced the relocation to Dhaka, where actors could come and participate in this important dialogue. After sharing the agenda and some last-minute clarifications, Ms Wrochna expressed that, while not trying to emulate what has been achieved in other regions, the hope was for this dialogue to help foster the creation of a community of practice (CoP) on the right to food in South Asia.

Highlights from the South Asia Right to Food Conference

Mohsin Ali, Secretary of the Right to Food Bangladesh Secretariat

Mohsin Ali provided an overview of the main findings of the South Asia Right to Food Conference (SARFC) that took place from 30 May to 1 June 2015 in Dhaka. The SARFC, organized jointly by a number of national and international organizations and networks from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, was inaugurated by her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh. With over 21 working sessions, the SARFC benefited from the participation of high-profile ministers, policy-makers, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, Non-governmental Organizations, academic institutions, statutory bodies and others.
The SARFC had a number of objectives, including greater experience sharing, networking and common strategy building among a range of actors in order to promote legislative and policy framework reforms at national and regional levels. Stemming from the discussions was the adoption of the Dhaka Declaration in which participants expressed their vision for a future where South Asia is free of poverty and hunger, and where the right to adequate food, nutrition security, and food sovereignty are ensured. A right to food and nutrition South Asian network was formed in order to facilitate the development and implementation of legal frameworks as well as to promote social protection systems with an emphasis on the rights of poor and marginalized communities.

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**It should be our commitment to ensure food and nutrition security across South Asia**

*Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh*

At the national level, recalling Article 15 of its national Constitution, the Government of Bangladesh highlighted a number of its own commitments towards the realization of the right to adequate food, including (among others): the National Food Policy 2006 that aims to ensure the adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food as well as to ensure adequate nutrition for all, with an emphasis on women and children; the National Social Security Strategy that addresses life cycle risks through better implementation of social safety net programmes; and the National 7th Five Year Plan that elaborates on strategies to ensure access to food, particularly for poor and vulnerable groups.

Also, given the high turnout of actors from Bangladesh, it led to the creation of the civil society umbrella network Right to Food Bangladesh, which adopted its charter in light of the Dhaka Declaration. Among other things, the charter foresees a commitment to end hunger in Bangladesh by 2025, notably by the formulation and implementation of a legal framework for the realization of the right to adequate food for all. The umbrella network has set its sights on an awareness-raising campaign about the necessity of a right to food act and the mobilization of different actors.

Besides adopting the Dhaka Declaration, the SARFC concluded by underlining the importance of adopting right to food legislation in order to ensure access to adequate food for all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.
Technical session: Learn and reflect on global/regional/national standards and processes on the right to food

Chaired by Dr Abdus Sattar Mandal, Bangladesh Agriculture and Development Expert

This session provided an overview of the national situation in the region as well as the global momentum for the realization of the right to adequate food. It was welcome to hear about developments on some of the pertinent national frameworks, which were later developed in other sessions, as well as the recent adoption by consensus of global documents for a greater implementation of the right to adequate food within the context of the reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Also, the expression of political will on the right to adequate food was refreshing to see, in light of political initiatives such as the Zero Hunger Challenge, of which Nepal and Bangladesh have a national component. Still, despite progress on several fronts that do contribute to reducing poverty and malnutrition, a number of important challenges were identified regarding the proper realization of the right to adequate food. One of the main weaknesses at the global level has to do with the lack of any enforcing mechanism to ensure that the right to adequate food is properly implemented and that, in case of violation, redress is provided for. As such, the lack of influence from human rights principles and standards within global economic and financial circles and institutions was rightfully singled out as a major hurdle to the realization of the right to adequate food.

Interactive actions to support the right to food

Anna Wrochna, Oxfam Regional Policy and Campaign Coordinator

Ms Wrochna presented the idea behind the current online petition for the right to food campaign in Bangladesh asking the government to pass the right to food act. Among the bases for the digital campaign was the possibility to reach other countries and stakeholders through this online channel. She finished by saying that more information was available on Oxfam’s website, and encouraged participants to sign up.

Key elements of the Right to Food Guidelines and international standards

Serena Pepino, FAO Project Officer

Serena Pepino began by highlighting how most of the countries represented in this dialogue had some provisions pertinent to the realization of the right to adequate food in their respective Constitutions. For instance, Nepal has an explicit guarantee, Pakistan has an implicit protection, while India and Bangladesh have directive principles of state policy recognizing the right to adequate food. In addition, each Constitution finds inspiration in provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and contains references to international commitments taken by the country under instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

She then reiterated that international instruments and standards are the basis for our work and should be seen as such. Elaborating on the ICESCR, she explained the three levels of obligation (respect,
protect and fulfil), the progressive nature of socio-economic rights through the maximum available
resources, the importance of regional and international cooperation, and human rights principles.

Let’s build on achievements at national level to take concrete steps at regional level to further advance and realize the right to food

Ms Pepino then explained FAO’s role and organization in promoting the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines. She stressed the guidelines’ adoption by consensus and that, building upon normative international law, they provide a basis for actions at the national level through concrete policy elements. She also pointed out that, as an advocacy tool for all stakeholders, the guidelines cover all necessary elements of a sound food security strategy and cross-sectoral coordination framework, and they translate human rights principles into concrete recommendations for action. She concluded by mentioning that in each of the represented countries, there have been developments on the right to food connected to the political will, whether related to the Zero Hunger Challenge or the activities negotiated between the countries and FAO.

Oxfam and FAO global and regional experience-sharing

Thierry Kesteloot, Oxfam Belgium

Thierry Kesteloot started by providing some context to the current dialogue. While going through some statistics of the food insecurity situation, he explained that such a dire situation was not caused by a lack of capacities, but rather by the type of food system and the lack of political will hampering the adoption of constraining measures to hold governments and businesses accountable for their obligations and responsibilities. Despite this, there has been progress in the political response, as food is again seen as a political issue and no longer as solely a commodity, which forces us to tackle food insecurity around the globe through stronger legal and policy frameworks.

Confronted with successive interrelated crises (food, financial, environmental and energy), there is a need for cross-sectoral coherent policy responses. To this end, the CFS becomes the key governing body for the realization of the right to food. Over the past few years, the right to food has become a main objective of the Global Strategic Framework while it has underpins recently adopted tools, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests. As a human rights based approach (HRBA) aims to tackle the root causes of food insecurity, it is important to bring small-scale food producers and women to the centre of debates aimed at defining our food system.

Even if the level or the quality differs, it is imperative to ensure the active participation of different actors, notably civil society movements, in right to food related processes

Mr Kesteloot later emphasized the reality that the HRBA is gradually being mainstreamed in research, citing reports by the High Level Panel of Experts as an example. Also, he underlined the fact that social
movements are becoming increasingly organized. As a result, they are becoming a central force in advancing the right to food from a grassroots perspective while translating global processes to local levels. He highlighted the negotiations on peasant rights at the Human Rights Council, as well as the impunity of transnational corporations, as examples of such efforts in current processes.

He concluded by indicating a few challenges, among which are the lack of discussions around the right to food in organizations such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization; the disconnect between the right to food and economic power actors, such as corporations and private investors; and the lack of recognition of the HRBA as the leading way to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. Finally, he drew inspiration from the situation around climate change discussions at the global level which, having benefitted from critical research to put pressure on decision-makers, will soon have a redress and grievance system.

Some participants inquired a bit more about the CFS, its reform, its role and its pertinence for South Asian actors. The CFS was reformed after the food crisis in 2009 in order to increase the political convergence and coherence in addressing food security and nutrition (FSN) challenges. Now, it is the most inclusive policy platform for FSN, as it not only has states participating during negotiations, but also civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. While it is eventually states that adopt the decisions, CSOs can actively participate, make presentations and propositions, and challenge some of the ideas. Due to their complex nature, CSOs are organized within the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM). The CSM is based on constituencies, with the priority given to constituencies most affected by food insecurity, such as small-scale farmers. Also, there is a strong regional participation of CSOs, with 17 subregional focal points. As pointed out previously by Thierry Kesteloot, the CFS has adopted several documents directly affecting the right to food, by emphasizing the adoption of a HRBA for instance, which ensures that all thematic debates, be they on water, biofuels or investments, are informed by human rights.

Another area of concern was on ways to make international financial institutions see human rights as “hard” law. While there was no magic recipe, some recent changes in power structures among some of those organizations, combined with an increased importance given to the HRBA, could facilitate a slow shift over time.
Technical session: Progress towards the realization of the right to adequate food

Chaired by Dr Abdus Sattar Mandal, Bangladesh Agriculture and Development Expert

This session offered interesting perspectives on all four countries’ national situations as well as a better understanding of some daily struggles faced by vulnerable groups, as exemplified by two Bangladeshi farmers. Given the different backgrounds of the speakers, national situations were presented through different lenses. Although sometimes lightly related to the right to food or failing to emphasize human rights principles and standards, a lot of national Constitutions (e.g. Nepal), laws (e.g. India’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), policies (e.g. Bangladesh’s National Social Safety Net Policy), and programmes (e.g. Pakistan’s Benazir Income Support Programme) have been adopted and implemented over the past few years. While they have their weaknesses, they have generally contributed to improving the standards of living of the targeted groups, especially on poverty reduction and food security related components. One aspect that stood out, however, was the lack of regional cooperation on some of these crucial issues, both related to national progress as well as when these issues are dealt with in global forums.

Testimonial by a woman farmer

Prashantika Rai, Bangladesh

Since joining the Oxfam-led initiative, Prashantika Rai – a marginalized farmer from Jamuna village (Kaharul Upozila, in the Dinazpur district, Bangladesh) – explained how she feels that she has better access to technology and training. While before she did not know how and where to go for assistance, now she has managed to apply for a loan from the local bank, which she received in the form of Tk50 000 (US$640), and together with other farmers has recently applied for free land that she feels confident they will get. She raised an issue related to marketing of produce that takes a lot of time, sometimes entire days, for which she would like to get support and services in order to increase efficiency. Also, she stressed the importance of remedying the current situation where farmers receive different wages based on their gender.

"As poor marginalized farmers, we have to work as day labourers in the field, but women are paid less than men, even though we are working in equal amount, so I am making a strong demand to all for equal wages for men and women"
Testimonial by a man farmer

Moijuddin Bachhu, Bangladesh

Moijuddin Bachhu, a marginalized farmer in Bangladesh, made a complaint related to the untimely delivery of seeds and fertilizers as well as the unfair price that farmers receive for their produce, which renders the selling price on the market lower than the production cost. He continued by explaining that he is unable to increase production, as the quality of seeds he receives is insufficient; he cannot get credit or loans from the bank, as his production is too little; and he also cannot sell directly to the government, as the latter buy from an intermediary. While he previously did not get recognition and was even harassed by the authorities, his situation has changed since joining a community benefitting from the support of Oxfam. Now, feeling that he is treated with respect and dignity, he is in the process of registering a cooperative which will bring him new opportunities.

"With our collective voices, we have gone from being harassed by authorities to being treated with respect and dignity"

Country experience: Pakistan

Imtiaz Ali Gopang, Deputy Commissioner for Food Security of the Pakistan Ministry of National Food Security and Research

Imtiaz Ali Gopang started by reminding everyone about the food security definition and some of its global challenges, and stressed the importance of government proactivity for its achievement. He presented a few governmental initiatives currently underway in Pakistan. The Planning Commission of Pakistan is currently engaged in a Social Safety Net Project with the provincial governments for developing provincial social protection policies through the provision of technical and financial assistance.

The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund is a governmental non-profit organization for community-driven development through a network of 129 partner organizations across the country, which has received an amount of 9.8 billion Pakistani rupees (US$93.5 million). It has the overall objective of improving the quality of life of poor and marginalized people, with goals such as eradicating extreme hunger and poverty; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women; improving maternal health; reducing child mortality; and achieving universal primary education.

"Without active steps and initiatives by the government, achieving food security would be impossible"

Mr Gopang then presented the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), established in 2008 to enhance the financial capacities of poor people and their dependent family members by formulating and implementing comprehensive policies. The following table shows the increase of the programme over the past eight years.
### Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase of beneficiaries</strong></td>
<td>1.7 million</td>
<td>5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual disbursement per capita per month</strong></td>
<td>1200 rupees (US$11.5)</td>
<td>1500 rupees (US$14.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual disbursement of entire programme</strong></td>
<td>16 billion rupees (US$152.7 million)</td>
<td>120 billion (US$1.15 billion)</td>
</tr>
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Among some of the other governmental initiatives presented were:

- **Waseela-e-Taleem**, which operates in 32 districts and reaches 600,000 registered children, with a stipend per child of 250 rupees per month (US$2.5);
- **Bait-ul-Mal (PBM)**, an autonomous body that has thus far disbursed over 2.28 billion rupees (US$21.8 million), which contributes toward poverty alleviation through the provision of financial assistance to the most marginalized, including destitute, widowed, orphaned, invalid, infirm and other needy persons, as per its eligibly criteria approved by its board; and
- **Kissan Package**, which provides 341 billion rupees (US$3.26 billion) through reductions in costs of production, financial support to farmers, and provision of credit and soft loans to the farming community.

Finally, Mr Gopang stressed that national food security can be ensured by reducing costs of production, upgrading the social status of the farming community, and increasing the productivity and profitability of the agricultural sector through a strategy of mobilizing genetic resources and mitigating climate change-related issues. He concluded by adding that regional fora should be established, legal frameworks should be better implemented, and a voluntary food bank should be set up, while also noting the key role of good governance in all of this.

A number of questions were raised on issues ranging from food safety to civil society participation and entitlements. Mr Gopang indicated that, while food safety is a provincial competence and civil society’s views are taken into account during the formulation of policies, food security for all in Pakistan is a directive principle of state policy recognized in Article 38 of the Constitution.

### Country experience: Nepal

**Dr Krishna Paudel**, Coordinator of the Alliance of Agriculture for Food in Nepal

Dr Krishna Paudel began by showing a drawing with different daily situations, all of them directly related to the realization of the right to food in Nepal. Among the situations discussed were those related to land grabbing, with around 25 percent of land in Nepal having been taken, and migration, with an ever increasing number of working-age people leaving rural communities to move to urban areas.

He then described how Nepal is currently undergoing a series of unprecedented changes in rural areas. While economic globalization and market enforcement have increasing impacts, a growing number
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of people are moving out of the agricultural sector, as it is difficult to enjoy an adequate standard of living. Moreover, as 87 percent of Nepal consists of mountains and hills, mechanization of agriculture through the green revolution is not a viable option. Also, with working-age men migrating, women are having an increasing role in agriculture. Dr Paudel also provided statistics on the current situation in rural Nepal, which is increasingly suffering from migration, of around 4 million young men, and natural hazards and the impact of climate change. Furthermore, he alluded to a number of additional challenges for the food security situation in Nepal, including the border blockade, the implementation of the newly adopted Constitution, and the recovery following the recent earthquake.

If we are advocates for the right to food, we have to talk about crucial issues, even the politically sensitive ones

These numerous challenges have a direct impact at a number of levels. At the political level, there is an increased dependency, vulnerability and insecurity which lead to less emphasis being placed on basic rights, such as food and nutrition. At the social level, there is a loss of agro-based livelihoods, a reduction in local food production, and an increased food insecurity and malnutrition situation in rural areas. At the environmental level, there is a disruption in the active management of mountain ecosystems, which leads to increased vulnerability as well as a reduction in agrobiodiversity.

Dr Paudel continued by highlighting a number of legislative advances in Nepal such as the newly adopted Constitution, which guarantees the right to adequate food for all in its Article 36, and the National Human Rights Commission, with a specific indicator for the right to food. The government has also pledged to adopt a framework law on the right to food within the next three years.

Before concluding, Dr Paudel spoke about Nepal’s food import deficit, which partially results in a high number of districts where there is a prevalence of food insecurity and a dependence on food aid (citing the example of Karnali). He then concluded by underlining a few required immediate actions, including the need to revisit the implementation gaps in the current frameworks, to emphasize food self-sufficiency and to look for comparative advantages, as Nepal cannot compete with the People’s Republic of China and India on some aspects. Finally, he stressed the need to cooperate regionally and to move from words to concrete actions so as to ensure food-related rights.

Country experience: India
Anuradha Talwar, India Right to Food Campaign

Anuradha Talwar began by explaining how the right to food can be realized. National food production has to be sufficient, and then people need to have access to the resources to produce their own food – water, land, forest, etc. In the case of people who only have their labour to sell, they need employment and proper wages for it. If these conditions are not met, then the government comes in. While over the long term it aims to ensure the aforementioned elements, in the short term it has to adopt measures. For the latter, she stressed that political will was crucial.

Speaking about some achievements of the Right to Food Campaign, she indicated that now, vulnerability being seen as going beyond just economics, there are discussions on rethinking how poverty is to be defined. Also, she mentioned that since the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act came in,
wages in rural areas have risen. Moreover, explaining the relationship between the campaign and all political parties and some media, she expressed that the biggest achievement was the establishment of a mechanism for civil society organizations to intervene directly with the government and to monitor progress.

For the right to food to become a reality, what you need is vibrant grassroots-level activities

Afterwards, Ms Talwar pointed out a number of gaps and challenges. For one, the rights referred to are not universal entitlements, which means that beneficiaries have to be selected – and there are difficulties with this process. Then she stressed that despite the laws, some basic issues have not been solved, such as questions of wages, control over productive resources, and employment. Also, even if some of the programmes were to be fully implemented, the allowances would not be sufficient to guarantee an adequate standard of living. In addition, while India is developing economically at a fast pace, this is not resulting in an increased capacity for people to access adequate food, as illustrated by the discrepancies between different parts of society.

Ms Talwar expressed both concern and optimism regarding the relationship of the campaign with the new government. On the one hand, she was concerned over the recent budget cuts for programmes related to the right to food as well as the emphasis of the government on cash transfers instead of food transfers. But she was also optimistic about the campaign, given the infrastructure in place for vibrant grassroots mobilization, the existence of state governments, and the opportunities for greater implementation of a number of laws.

A number of questions followed her presentation, including requests for more details about the Indian experience using judicial tools, and for some observations on the new act. On the former, she explained that in India, it essentially started with a court case that saw a broad interpretation of the right to life, guaranteed in the Indian Constitution, as containing the right to food. On the latter, she explained that the campaign is not satisfied with the new act because, in addition to not being universal, it does not deal with food procurement or food production, the grievance system is not functioning, and the implementation is lacking.

Country experience: Bangladesh
Dr MM Akash, Professor in the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka

Dr MM Akash started his presentation by rejoicing in the fact that a lot has been done over the past decade, but warning that a lot more still needed to be achieved. To illustrate this, he listed a number of goals before moving on to some achievements and failures in the areas of nutrition, production and entitlements.

Dr Akash described a number of goals in Bangladesh, among which was the achievement of a hunger-free country. He explained that this could be achieved through balanced, healthy growth, with safe, uncontaminated food, cheaply available to everybody so that everyone could have increased access to adequate food, whether through market or governmental provisions.
The Dhaka Declaration shows a consensus around a path towards achieving food security

Then, he highlighted a number of achievements and failures related to nutrition. Citing *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014*, he mentioned that the number of undernourished people has diminished drastically in Bangladesh, although the availability of balanced and diversified food is still a problem. Also, he stressed that children should be a target group, as this could prove very beneficial. While there has been a lack of nutritional improvement, with even higher-income portions of society suffering from malnutrition, the progress is more encouraging on poverty.

In terms of production achievements and failures, he mentioned that despite a decline in cultivated land, peasants were able to ensure their self-sufficiency. Then, he pointed out three limitations: the government continues to subsidize the agriculture sector; landless tenants still do not have sufficient security of tenure; and small-scale farmers are unable to access financing, with prices of main crops often less than the costs of production.

Dr Akash then spoke about the progress and shortcomings in regards to entitlements for the poor. While he alluded to 21 social protection programmes, which take around 2 percent of public expenditure, he noted there is a need to take drastic measures to improve the efficiency and entitlements of such programmes. To this end, he mentioned that local-level democracy has to be instituted to monitor the delivery programme, especially considering that universal coverage is not possible in Bangladesh.
Working groups: Achievements, opportunities and challenges for the realization of the right to adequate food at subregional and national levels in South Asia

As an initial participative session to set the path for the following sessions and in order for all to better agree on the key achievements, opportunities and challenges at national and regional levels, participants were divided into three groups and asked to share their national experiences and think about ways to bring them together at the regional level. On the basis of each group’s contributions, discussions took place to compile common findings. Here below are the main common elements that were discussed under each category:

Achievements

All countries:
- Either recognizing explicitly or through directive principles of state policy the right to food in their respective Constitutions.
- Having democracies.
- Having programmes that support farmers.
- Managing to improve the situation of child undernutrition.
- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh becoming self-sufficient in cereal and rice.

Bangladesh:
- Written commitment of the government in its seven-year national policy plan to ensure the right to food.

India:
- The Food Security Act of 2013 as well as other social protection schemes.

Nepal:
- Explicit guarantee of the right to food in the Constitution.

Pakistan:
- The 2008 adoption of the BISP.

Opportunities

- Strengthening legal and policy frameworks within each country.
- Participation in regional and international forums.
• Addressing issues such as climate change, ecological problems, food smuggling, blockades, and export bans.
• Increased mobilization in all these democratic countries.
• Learning from one another.
• Engaging at different levels such as academia, research and social movements.
• Using the Internet to broaden the actions on the right to food.
• Addressing labour standards.
• Developing cross-country projects.
• Developing monitoring systems, where Nepal’s experience with its numerous indicators could be beneficial.
• Establishment of a regional platform.

**Challenges**

• Constitutional provisions exist but lack legal frameworks.
• Lack of political will, transparency and accountability.
• Agriculture is not a national priority.
• Lack of sectoral and intersectoral coordination.
• Privatization and commercialization of natural resources.
• Land grabbing.
• Lack of access to resources, information, infrastructure and markets.
• Women-friendly technologies are not available.
• Difficulties in mitigating and adapting to adverse impacts of climate change.
• Cash transfers are often preferred to food transfers.
Day 2 | Tuesday, 24 November 2015

Opening remarks by Oxfam and FAO

Anna Wrochna, Oxfam Regional Policy and Campaign Coordinator
Serena Pepino, FAO Project Officer
Badi Akhter, Oxfam Bangladesh Program Director

Anna Wrochna opened the second day by welcoming the different actors, hailing the diversity of fields and countries represented, and emphasizing the objective of the dialogue to share national experiences and progress and translate them into regional commitments. Then, Serena Pepino stressed the importance of regional cooperation for the realization of the right to adequate food at the national level, using examples of key elements such as multi-stakeholder participation and multisectoral coordination. Finally, Badi Akhter expressed the contribution of Oxfam to policy processes through advocacy campaigns that are important for improving the lives of poor people, on topics such as climate change and urbanization. He closed the opening remarks by emphasizing the great opportunity offered by this dialogue to share views and ideas, so as to create positive outcomes to facilitate thinking with ministries on how to move ahead for the realization of the right to adequate food.

Welcome address by the Government of Bangladesh

Mushfeka Ikfat, Secretary of the Ministry of Food

Mushfeka Ikfat began her address by welcoming everyone and acknowledging the importance of such a dialogue. She underlined the recognition of the United Nations towards Bangladesh for its achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. She stressed the importance of each state’s responsibility to ensure the basic necessities of life, of which food is one, as declared in the Constitution of Bangladesh.
Speaking about the Bangladesh constitutional directive principle of state policy, she referred to the National Food Policy of 2006 that aims to implement this provision. While lauding her country’s successful policy efforts geared towards increased production and better access to food, as recognized by the United Nations, she reminded everyone of the need for greater emphasis to be put on nutrition.

"It is a fundamental responsibility of the state to secure the basic necessities of life, including food for its citizens"

Recalling the SARCF, she stressed the commitment expressed by her prime minister in ensuring the food and nutrition security of all across South Asia, citing the numerous governmental policies ranging anywhere from the food policy plan of action to the investment plan. She added that the government has included nutrition as an area of great emphasis in the new Five Year Plan.

Ms Ikfat concluded by praising the efforts of Oxfam and wishing the dialogue great success. She hopes that it could lead to exploring new areas for collaboration and is confident that it will facilitate the enhancement of initiatives for the realization of the right to food in the region.

The welcome address was followed by a comprehensive recap of activities from the first day, presented by Raksha Sharma, Programme Coordinator of the Food Security Governance Project of Oxfam in Nepal.
Technical session: Legal perspective on the right to food in South Asia

Chaired by Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Executive Chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre

During this session, some of the national progress in the region was presented and discussed. From the adoption of a new Constitution that explicitly guarantees the right to adequate food in Nepal, to the adoption of national laws (e.g. India's National Food Security Act and Pakistan's Bait-ul-Mal Act) and programmes (e.g. Bangladesh’s numerous social protection schemes) with a direct impact on the realization of the right to adequate food, it was evident that, despite much effort still being needed, some important steps have recently been taken that provide a basis for different actors to build upon. Still, as was mentioned during the different presentations, even the most important milestones in the region have flaws that need to be addressed. Hence, to adopt a policy, a law or a Constitution with a greater recognition of the right to food is pivotal, but its implementation to benefit the daily lives of citizens, particularly of the most vulnerable, is crucial for improving the standards of living and realizing the right to adequate food. For all the countries, it was clear that the implementation phase requires more attention.

Status of right to food legal framework and policies in South Asia

Apurba Khatiwada, Member of the Nepal Law Commission

Apurba Khatiwada began by discussing the hunger situation in South Asia over the past 15 years, supporting it with data from the 2015 Global Hunger Index. While a common trait across the region was the progress made over that period, he highlighted important differences from one country to the other. He then proceeded by presenting the current ratification situation of international instruments in the region. Overall, countries in the region are States Parties to all the pertinent instruments for the right to food, except for the Kingdom of Bhutan to the ICESCR and to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the latter.

Regarding the national level, he presented the constitutional situation by highlighting the recently adopted Constitution of Nepal, which notably recognizes the right to adequate food as a fundamental right, as well as the Constitution of Bangladesh, which recognizes the duty of the state to ensure the right to food of its citizens. Then, he discussed examples of national jurisprudence that have great impact on the right to food in countries of the region. For instance, in People’s Union for Civil Liberties vs Union of India and Others, the Supreme Court of India interpreted the constitutionally guaranteed right to life as including the right to food. In Bajuddin Minhya and Others vs GON, Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court of Nepal broadened the scope of the right to adequate food in the country. Afterwards, Mr Khatiwada presented two national legislative efforts, in the form of India’s National Food Security Act and Pakistan’s Bait-ul-Mal Act. Of the former, he mentioned the intended coverage of two-thirds of the total population, while of the latter, he explained its focus on specifically vulnerable groups.
Regional cooperation and sharing of best practices is essential for the realization of the right to adequate food in South Asia

Mr Khatiwada continued by exploring specific national sectoral laws across the region on a number of issues, such as market regulations, access to productive resources, and food safety. He concluded by stressing a number of elements, including the theoretical hurdle that still exists in regard to a hierarchy of rights, the lack of a human rights based approach, and the weak implementation of the existing legislative frameworks. Some areas that would benefit from greater attention include: gender equality; rights of indigenous people; the promotion of traditional knowledge; the response to climate change; transparency; and the establishment of effective redress mechanisms.

Right to food in the Constitution of Nepal

Raju Chapagain, President of JuRI-Nepal

Raju Chapagain began his presentation by recalling the eight-year process that led to the adoption of the Constitution in 2015 and the political violence that followed its adoption. Until the adoption of the interim Constitution in 2007, socio-economic rights were confined to directive principles. During the eight-year period, the Supreme Court of Nepal, on the basis of the interim Constitution, ruled that the right to food sovereignty was interrelated with the right to live with dignity. However, while the interim Constitution had provisions on some socio-economic rights, including a right to food sovereignty, the new Constitution goes further and provides for an important number of socio-economic rights under the fundamental rights section. More specifically, while Article 36 explicitly guarantees the right to food for all, there are a handful of other Articles that further strengthen the guarantee.

Besides having a great number of fundamental rights and directive principles that either directly or indirectly contribute to the right to food, the Constitution of Nepal also stipulates on the status of international commitments at the national level, which is important considering that Nepal is a State Party to several international instruments regarding the protection of the right to adequate food.

Constitutional protections of the right to food have to be supported by strong implementation mechanisms to turn promises into realities

Moreover, Mr Chapagain explained how the Constitution of Nepal provides for accountability in its implementation. Based on Article 133, the Supreme Court possesses a number of judicial powers, including judicial review and public litigation, the latter of which is also a prerogative of High Courts. In addition, Article 249 empowers the National Human Rights Commission to monitor and investigate human rights violations and take measures to hold the respective authorities accountable. For its part, the National Women Commission is empowered through Article 252 to monitor discrimination and violence against women and make the necessary recommendations. Also, Articles 53 and 54 provide for parliamentary oversight through the evaluation of the obligatory yearly governmental report on the implementation of directive principles and policies, as well as the establishment of a committee to monitor their progressive realization.
Despite the progressive nature of the document, Mr Chapagain detailed the existence of important challenges in bringing the document to reality. Among some of the constraints are weak implementing legislation, energy and food dependencies, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Finally, he concluded by outlining the way forward. The first step will be the elaboration and adoption of a framework law on the right to adequate food. To this end, JuRI-Nepal and FIAN International have already produced a preliminary draft. Then, some other areas outlined include: grassroots mobilization, sensitization and awareness raising; strategic use of judicial processes at different levels; and the promotion of non-judicial accountability through national human rights institutions and parliamentary oversight.

**Components to be considered in the adoption of a framework law on the right to food**

Fowzul Azim, Chief Research Officer of the Law Commission of Bangladesh

Fowzul Azim began his presentation by recalling the inclusion of a directive principle of state policy on the right to food in the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh. While this was a non-binding provision, it aimed to guide the adoption of measures and actions by the government to contribute to the realization of the right to food. As such, the following years and decades have seen the adoption of an important number of laws in addition to the development of policies and programmes that either directly or indirectly contribute to the achievement of this constitutionally guaranteed directive principle.

**While directive principles of state policy are important, a statutory protection of the right to adequate food is imperative**

He highlighted that today, while around 15 programmes are somehow related to this provision, people in Bangladesh still want a statutory protection of the right to adequate food. While there are approximately 50 laws in Bangladesh that pertain to the right to food, it remains that none are explicitly related to this right. As such, he argued for the need to have a framework law that would be based on a human rights based approach, where the rights of marginalized groups and the obligations of the government are clearly spelled out. This framework law should have an effective remedy mechanism and emphasize the cross-sectoral nature of the matter. Mr Azim concluded by expressing his hope that the draft framework law would be finalized by the end of the year.

**Learning from the Indian legal framework**

Dipa Sinha, India Right to Food Campaign

Dipa Sinha began by presenting some elements related to the context in which the Right to Food Campaign was created in India. Among the key issues were: making the right to food a fundamental right; converting all existing social protection schemes into entitlements; tackling large-scale malnutrition and chronic hunger; and securing employment as a fundamental right linked to the right to food. She indicated that, stemming from the 2001 People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) petition to the Supreme Court, to date the Court has issued more than 100 interim orders, 500 affidavits, and nearly 130 interim applications.
She then highlighted some of the orders issued by the Supreme Court, including the conversion of all food and employment schemes into legal entitlements; the universalization of food entitlement programmes for children; and the creation of the independent mechanism of Commissioners to the Supreme Court to monitor all food and employment programmes.

Of the latter, Ms Sinha explained that Commissioners are appointed by the Supreme Court to monitor all food schemes in the country, and that their mandate extends to entitlement feeding, employment, food subsidy and social security programmes. Then she detailed how the Commissioners work and explained that they are able to hold the state accountable through regular engagement with the different governments and the Joint Commission of enquiries, as well as regular reports on non-compliance to the Supreme Court. As such, this independent mechanism has had a great impact thus far, including its contribution to the adoption of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which guarantees 100 days of employment a year, and to the provision of spaces for civil society to engage with the state on food and employment-related programmes.

"Despite great progress and achievements since its birth, the Right to Food Campaign still has a lot of ground to cover to ensure the realization of the right to adequate food in India"

On a correlated note, Ms Sinha continued by presenting the National Food Security Act, adopted in 2013 which, through its targeted public distribution system, provides entitlements for 75 percent of rural and 50 percent of urban populations. It also provides entitlements for mothers, such as maternity benefits of no less than 6 000 Indian rupees (US$87), and for children, such as a free midday meal. Moreover, the Act provides measures for the advancement of food security as well as the establishment of broad grievance and redress mechanisms.

Still, despite the impressive progress, she stressed a number of challenges that remain for the realization of the right to food in India. Among some of the main challenges she identified are the recent budget cuts for social protection programmes, the constant pressure from privatization, and the implementation of some of the aforementioned acts.

Ms Sinha concluded by explaining in more detail the internal workings of the Right to Food Campaign. As a decentralized network that builds on local initiatives and voluntary cooperation, the campaign only has a small secretariat whose work is mostly done by volunteers. Also, despite the progress, there are a great number of issues that it wants to address, such as the universalization of some schemes and the effective implementation of all nutrition-related schemes, as well as social security arrangements for those who cannot work. Finally, she mentioned some of the activities through which the campaign advances some of its goals, such as public hearings, rallies, dharnas, padyatras, conventions, action-oriented research, media advocacy, and lobbying with members of Parliament.
Working groups: Where do we go from here?

On the basis of the numerous presentations and discussions, this session voiced the participants’ perspectives on the way forward. During this short session, the participants were split in three groups to discuss obstacles and challenges related to one of the following three topics: 1) the rights of vulnerable and extreme poor to access social protection, food security and nutrition; 2) policy and implementation gaps; and 3) access to productive resources and rights of farmers. After the small group discussions, key elements were shared with the rest of the group.

1. An important challenge identified by a number of participants from different countries was related to the weakness of targeting schemes, which were attributed to different causes. A solution proposed was to create open databases, which would enable people to challenge their accuracy. Another obstacle was the lack of information, to which the use of mobile phones and radios were thought of as solutions. Also, the group saw an important role for Non-governmental Organizations to help organize vulnerable people who have little time to do so. Other obstacles identified touched on: the size of allocations, which are currently too little; politically based bias and corruption; discrimination towards certain groups; and the need for stronger monitoring systems.

2. In line with the question, each group presented its findings on a country basis. For Pakistan, an obstacle identified was related to the limited scope of the BISP, which the country would like to increase considerably over the coming years. It was explained that separate allocations are given to internally displaced populations while the targeting is carried out through a scorecard system and a yearly survey. In Nepal, targeting was identified as the main challenge. Other challenges touched on the lack of information and awareness raising for vulnerable groups as well as the absence of local elections for more than a decade. As for India, the lack of coherence and harmonization between selection criteria from different state governments was stressed as an obstacle to the implementation of good policies and laws. Also, the universalization of programmes without an increase in budget, as well as awareness raising, were some of the other main challenges. In Bangladesh, while there are a great number of social protection schemes, two important challenges were related to the lack of entitlements as well as the lack of focus on the needs of the most vulnerable. Also, the lack of implementation guidelines as well as the prevalence of political influence at the local level were seen as a considerable impediment.

3. An important challenge was the lack of tenure security. In turn, several related challenges were identified, such as land grabbing by companies or individuals and the lack of recognition of customary tenure rights. In the case of Nepal, a related obstacle was the absence of a centralized database which would allow for verification of the amount of acres that are owned.
Technical session: Obstacles and challenges as seen by high-level experts

Chaired by Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Chairman of the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation

During this session, the different speakers, coming from different countries and constituencies, approached the thematic differently. An attention-grabbing part of this session was the discussions around important issues for the sub-regional and national realization of the right to adequate food that were rarely mentioned in the previous sessions, such as the importance and impact of international trade negotiations, the crucial role of and challenges related to access to land and resources (particularly in the case of Nepal), the lack of interest and future in the agricultural sector for younger generations (especially in Pakistan and Nepal), and the numerous legislative and policy-related implementation gaps (notably in Bangladesh). As countries are facing similar challenges, whether at national level or at the global level, the need to increase regional cooperation by different actors was once again exemplified.

Trade, bilateral issues and the right to food

Biraj Patnaik, Principal Adviser to the Supreme Court of India’s Commissioners Office

Biraj Patnaik began by emphasizing two elements that he thought had been barely discussed thus far. First, he discussed some of the dynamics related to the trade negotiations currently underway in the World Trade Organization that will culminate in Nairobi in December 2015. Pointing out the Uruguay round agreement and the agricultural subsidies allowed for rich countries, he explained the current claim by these same countries that public stockholding programmes were trade distorting and should be limited to a certain level. However, he highlighted how certain countries were subsidizing their own agricultural sector at rates several dozen times higher than India, which is the country currently under the spotlight. Moreover, he explained the significance of the least-developed countries’ package introduced during the Bali negotiations, which he argued was mainly aimed at dividing countries from that block and preventing their alliance with the G33. Another tension point detailed was the will of some countries to divide the BRICS countries. In sum, he stressed the importance of civil society movements in developing and emerging countries to standing up and backing the unity of their respective countries on these major issues.
Civil society organizations and social movements need to unite across the region and among developing and emerging countries so as to jointly address major issues that affect the right to food of us all

Then, Mr Patnaik discussed ways to tackle issues that are bilateral in nature but have an effect on the entire region, such as the increasing role of the agribusiness sector as well as border conflicts. For instance, he referred to the border blockade as a prime example of such issues. He insisted on the need to have greater cooperation and unity among social movements to take up such issues. Another example provided was related to countries signing bilateral energy agreements that may have considerable environmental impacts for years to come, while civil society movements do not have united stances on such issues that directly pertain to the realization of the right to adequate food. He concluded by underlining the importance of access to resources and the different facets of community livelihoods for the realization of the right to adequate food.

Legislative challenges and opportunities in Bangladesh

Naren Das, Joint Secretary of the Office of Secretary, Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division of Bangladesh

Naren Das used his presentation to enumerate and explain a number of key legislative situations facing Bangladesh that either represent challenges or offer opportunities. Among some of the main challenges identified were those related to policies and procedures, including access to justice, which is limited and difficult, and the implementation gaps of some of the numerous policies, which are often lacking and inconsistent.

In Bangladesh, a number of legislative situations exist that, while representing challenges, offer great opportunities to contribute to the realization of the right to food

Then, he offered a number of opportunities that exist for Bangladesh to progress towards the realization of the right to food. First, a transparent distribution system, a transparent procurement system, and a transparent procedure for farmers’ access to seed and fertilizers could be established. Then, he underlined the need to allocate responsibilities among the different governmental departments so as to increase the efficiency in ensuring food security. He also explained the need to establish effective and transparent administrative and judicial enforcement mechanisms and to ensure access to effective remedies, especially for vulnerable groups in situations of food insecurity.

Mr Das concluded by touching on a number of specific areas in need of particular attention, including gender discrimination related to access to food at the household level; insurance schemes for climate change-related events; equitable distribution of food during crisis; and the need to increase public sector research and development.
Obstacles and challenges in Pakistan
Imtiaz Ali Gopang, Deputy Commissioner for Food Security of the Pakistan Ministry of National Food Security and Research

Imtiaz Ali Gopang began by reminding everyone about general global matters related to food security, including the impacts of climate change on water resources in South Asia. As such, he suggested that climate-smart agriculture was the prime solution to facing these numerous challenges, given its integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. He then explained the contribution of mechanisms for distribution of surplus food, considering that the production levels of the main food crops have risen over the past few years.

He went on to explain that, as one of the main determinants for fixing the minimum guaranteed price of a crop, the cost of production had increased manifold in recent years. The situation has now worsened in the wake of a downward trend of oil prices and grain stocks and the imposition of taxes on basic agricultural inputs, like seed and fertilizer among others. This conjuncture represents a critical challenge for the sustainability of the agricultural sector, with people moving out of the sector due to the lack of profitability, and as agricultural land is turned into residential and commercial plots. With more people leaving rural areas, Pakistan’s current urban/rural ratio has moved to 60 percent and 40 percent respectively.

“Good governance and political will are vital for ensuring growth and development in farm and non-farm sectors”

Mr Gopang continued by explaining two land-related challenges: the decline in the physical quantity and quality of land, which is threatening food security; and poor management of land resources for sustainable food security. As for water-related challenges, he mentioned the degradation of resources as well as the low supply of irrigation water coupled with its inefficient use. Stressing the need for good governance and political will, he explained that in the subregion, public sectors tend to have over-extended roles in areas where the private sector may be better suited, while its progress falls short in areas where it has an important role to play.

He concluded by highlighting that, with good governance and political will, the right to food could be better ensured by practicing climate-smart agriculture; implementing legal frameworks; establishing mechanisms for the distribution of surplus food stocks; offering incentives for farming communities; and efficiently utilizing natural resources. Finally, he added the need to establish proper regional forums and to be mindful of effective implementation mechanisms for legal provisions.

Access to productive resources and food security in Nepal
Dr Suresh Dhakal, Chairperson of the Community Self Reliance Centre in Nepal

Dr Suresh Dhakal began by pointing out that Nepal is a major food importing country, as exemplified by the recent increase in food imports by over 20 percent. Still, as he explained, there is no basis for such a situation. As such, he emphasized the importance of access to land for the right to food in Nepal and the current shortcomings in the land tenure system, with studies highlighting that equitable land distribution is more likely to produce broad-based and inclusive agricultural growth than
highly concentrated land distribution. Also, he discussed the challenges pertaining to land utilization, mainly underutilization and uncultivated land, which directly contribute to the food insecurity situation prevailing in the country.

Dr Dhakal continued in the same line by supporting the main challenges identified with statistics, such as 70 percent of the land being owned by the government, of which over 20 percent consists of national parks and reserves. Around three quarters of the population depends on agriculture, with small-scale farming being predominant, as around 80 percent hold less than one hectare. In light of this, he mentioned that many rural people suffered from hunger mainly because they were landless, they did not have tenure security, or they did not have sufficient access to productive resources. Also, some of these issues were amplified by the difficult environmental conditions.

"Access to land is pivotal for the realization of the right to adequate food in Nepal, and social mobilization is crucial to ensure it"

Then he discussed potential ways forward to improve access to land while increasing the productivity in the use of existing land, which would expand the number of small-scale farmers who could directly benefit from agricultural growth processes. As such, he proposed farm mechanization through the creation of farmers’ cooperatives and reiterated the need for land distribution, better utilization, tenure security, and proper administration and adjudication.

Dr Dhakal concluded by stressing the central role of social movements for the realization of the right to food in Nepal. He pointed to activities such as education, empowerment, and strengthening of people’s organization, as well as strong mobilization for policy changes and implementation. Finally, he mentioned a number of achievements of the land rights movement in Nepal that have led to an important surge in the sense of freedom, identity and dignity.
Moving forward with a right to food community of practice in South Asia

Chaired by Anna Wrochna, Oxfam Regional Policy and Campaign Coordinator and Serena Pepino, FAO Project Officer

After a brief recap of the first two days by Anna Wrochna, Serena Pepino outlined the plan of the morning session. The main objective of the session was to think of ways to collectively move forward with the process. Some of the main findings are also contained in the plan of action in Annex II. Facilitated by a few guiding questions and other regions’ examples, the participants were divided into three groups, who then reported back in a plenary session. So as to narrow the scope of discussions and increase the efficiency of the session, the following guiding questions were presented: a) What could be the added value of a regional initiative (are there specific regional solutions, could it add value to national-level work)?; b) What would be the main elements of a right to food CoP in South Asia (how do you see its realization in terms of resources, organization, people, constraints, practices, etc.)?; and c) How can you work together to improve the implementation of the right to food in South Asia (what would be the ideal compositions, goals and priorities in the next 1–2 years)?

After intense discussions, the first group acknowledged that while some other regional experiences were informative, South Asia does not have similar governmental-led regional processes. As such, an emphasis should be placed on strengthening social movements at the national level and, over time, seeing to an organic mobilization at the regional level. Still, the group stressed that it does not mean that national processes cannot be dealt with at a regional level, with assistance from one another. As for a CoP, the group identified two levels at which it could be considerably useful: to help strengthen work at the national level through such regional cooperation; and to work on regional issues such as cross-border matters and regional commitments already pledged but currently dormant. Moreover, the group mentioned two main roads to network building: to think of a network before seeking funding; or to have strong in-country networks which later join together organically for regional cooperation. Finally, the group explained that such a regional collaboration should start with a limited
number of countries, then gradually reach out to other South Asian countries and organize events in external countries such as Thailand, with the assistance of FAO, so as to allow for the representation of all countries.

The second group added to elements mentioned by the first group by detailing the added value of such a CoP. As countries have common problems and face similar challenges, there are many opportunities to learn from each other’s experiences, by dealing jointly with cross-border issues and eventually developing a common understanding and agenda at a regional level. The group also reiterated the notion that such a regional network should be achieved through an organic process and that the current emphasis should be placed on strengthening national networks.

As for the third group, in addition to agreeing with the main elements from the previous groups, they saw increased regional awareness and collaboration as a way to strengthen capacities of local networks. They described their vision of strong national initiatives based within local contexts before eventually joining forces at the regional level. In turn, they stressed the need for such a regional CoP to be completely independent of governmental, corporate and donor influences. As a non-governmental initiative it could, on an ad hoc basis, seek the participation and contribution of such stakeholders.

To conclude, participants and organizers alike stressed the potential for and need of further and deeper cooperation among the different actors in the South Asian region. Before the conclusion of the dialogue and before the media session, participants from each country outlined a number of priorities and commitments. From Bangladesh, participants committed to mobilize support for the necessity of having a right to food act while raising awareness on the need to move away from the simple emphasis on food security, without the rights component. Moreover, while striving to advance civil society processes, such as the initiative started at the SARFC, they will try to hold a meeting with the parliamentary committee on food. Participants from India agreed for the Right to Food Campaign to take the regional process forward and be available to support other actors. In Nepal, participants outlined a number of national priorities which include the adoption of a legislative framework on the right to food, the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation capacities, and the consolidation of the right to food network, as well as the continuation of work on areas such as land and climate change. As for Pakistan, the need to promptly establish regional seed and food banks and the necessity of creating a regional forum, possibly with the help of FAO, for countries to meet and discuss on issues related to the right to food were emphasized.

To conclude, the Director General of the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Government of Bangladesh expressed a number of commitments. Among them were increasing agricultural production, enhancing efficient food delivery to the most vulnerable, and expanding social safety net programmes. Stemming from obligations provided for in Articles 18 and 38 of the Constitution, he reiterated the commitment of the government to fight against hunger and poverty and to ensure food security for all in the country.

The dialogue came to an end with a media briefing that saw one participant from each country, as well as representatives of Oxfam and FAO, answer some of the questions from the Bangladesh media. With an important media contingent, impressions and main outcomes of the dialogue were shared and discussed.
Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, an overarching theme at the national level has to be the important progress on components related to the realization of the right to adequate food made over the past few years, both in terms of establishing frameworks and reducing the number of hungry people. In terms of frameworks, several positive developments took place, including the adoption of the Nepalese Constitution that explicitly guarantees the right to adequate food; the strengthening of the Indian legislative frameworks with laws such as the National Food Security Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act; and the consolidation of a number of policies and programmes in Bangladesh and Pakistan, including the National Social Safety Net Policy in the former and the BISF in the latter. While some are very recent, others are currently aiming to improve their respective implementation and increase their outreach. As for the reduction in the number of hungry people, there has been encouraging progress, as exemplified by Bangladesh meeting the first Millennium Development Goal target to halve the proportion of hungry people.

Still, a lot more remains to be done to ensure that everyone in the subregion enjoys his or her right to adequate food. A range of actions could be evaluated to strengthen the implementation, efficiency and outreach of current policy and legislative frameworks pertinent for the right to adequate food, as well as to follow a human rights based approach to develop new and additional measures to progressively realize the right to adequate food for all, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups. As such, further work could be aimed at strengthening the capacity level and the backbone of civil society's national structures on the right to food, building on recent progress in the subregion and learning from neighbouring countries’ experiences so as to empower right holders to claim their rights and duty bearers to meet their obligations. While subregional meetings such as this dialogue and the previous SARFC are great occasions to increase such collaboration, and networking between civil society movements already exists through informal channels, the aim should be to considerably expand the scope and to consolidate this collaboration in a systematic manner. Increasing the awareness, outreach and mobilization of grassroots movements on right to food related issues would enable a greater impact on the elaboration and implementation of legislative and policy processes related to the right to food.
At the regional level, a recurring theme during the dialogue was the lack of regional cooperation and institutions at the governmental level in addition to the limited scope and informal nature of social movement collaboration. As the added value of such increased collaboration was detailed and sought for on a number of issues, participants laid out a handful of stages to keep in mind for the development of an organic regional CoP. Given the advantages it could bring at regional and national levels for the realization of the right to adequate food in South Asia, it will be important for such spirit to be kept alive and fostered in the coming months and years.
Annex I. Joint press release by Oxfam and FAO

South Asian Dialogue on the Right to Food successfully concluded today in Dhaka

FAO and Oxfam say it will promote an emerging right to food community of practice for improved food security in South Asia

25 November 2015, Dhaka – The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Oxfam today concluded the South Asian Dialogue on the Right to Food, a jointly organized event that called for the participation of a multi-stakeholder platform with members from government, national right to food networks of civil society organizations and movements, academia and think tanks, and Oxfam and FAO, drawing from four countries in the region: India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ms Mushfeka Ikfat, Honourable Secretary of the Ministry of Food in Bangladesh, closed the welcome session of the dialogue stressing the importance of such an event, highlighting current progress and challenges related to the right to food in Bangladesh while sharing her enthusiasm for such an initiative.

The dialogue benefited from the participation of 40 international and national guests. Over the three days of exchanges and discussions, the group highlighted achievements, challenges and opportunities to promote an emerging right to food community of practice for improved food security and nutrition in South Asia. The event allowed for reflection over issues related to global, regional and national standards, policy processes, and relevant thematic areas which could serve as entry points for further action and strengthened commitment on the right to food at the national level. Through evidence, experience sharing and best practices, it was possible to draw parallels and learn from each participating country expert.

The dialogue showed that challenges to progressively realize the right to food, and therefore opportunities to contribute to a more enabling environment to fight hunger and malnutrition in the subregion, are complex and multifaceted:

- Poor policy implementation, coherence and harmonization.
- Insufficient allocation of resources, inefficient targeting of beneficiaries and exclusion of specific groups of social protection schemes and safety nets.
- Weak tenure rights, especially in regards to customary tenure, and land grabbing by national or multinational actors.
- Lack of proper information channels to inform and increase general awareness on this human right, avoiding common misconceptions.
- Insufficient coordination among stakeholders for more integrated action both at the national and regional level.
- Weak monitoring and redress mechanisms.

The dialogue concluded with an explicit commitment from all participants to continue working on the right to food and an agreement on the added value of a community of practice on the right to food in South Asia. The representatives of civil society movements present at the dialogue agreed to work towards a two-fold objective to both strengthen national-level advocacy, coherence and coordination, while also beginning to systematically and increasingly engage at the regional level. They also agreed to provide a platform to learn from each other, address national and cross-border issues, and reinforce existing positive aspects of regional cooperation. The participants spoke about the next meeting where civil society groups of South Asia will come together to discuss right to food matters, to be held in Kolkata on 16–17 of February 2016.

FAO supports the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines at the country level and ad hoc action to promote better regional coordination and coherence for the promotion of the right to food. In particular, FAO has directly supported the Government of Nepal to promote, protect and monitor human rights in programmes, policies and legislation on food security and the right to food since 2012.

Oxfam’s GROW campaign builds on the premise that hunger and undernourishment can be ended globally, and builds mainstream public awareness through Oxfam advocacy with alliances and networks to influence governments, international institutions and companies. A specific component of GROW is Oxfam’s global advocacy on the right to food, which in South Asia has focused on alliances with right to food networks both on national food-related legislation (with regional seminars and conferences, advocacy activities, research, lawyers’ training, popular tribunals, publications, and online campaigns) as well as implementation of programmes at the national level.
Annex II. Plan of action and country commitments with the aim to create a right to food community of practice\(^1\) in South Asia

**Plan of action**

1. Considering the challenging context of intercountry governmental relations in the region, a government-led regional process will need to be considered at a later stage.

2. CSOs and movements decided to work together in a more regional manner through a community of practice (CoP), looking at concrete issues and possible solutions to ensure the right to food is realized.

3. The CoP can work on two levels: helping strengthen work at the national level through regional cooperation, with a clear agenda which government counterparts can understand, to ensure dialogue and meaningful discussions; and working on two kinds of regional issues – a. cross-border issues which are hindering the right to food in other countries; b. reinforcing positive aspects of regional cooperation and commitments already made by countries but dormant, e.g. food and seed banks.

4. Three main elements could be the initial focus of the CoP: continuing the exchange on legislative work; discussing how to build and strengthen national platforms and campaigns; thinking about common issues and translating cross-border issues into common actions.

5. The CoP should benefit from stronger in-country networks which will seek to build the road towards more cooperation. The network formation should be an organic process where countries focus on an inward looking approach, attempting to strengthen national networks without forcing the hand of regional ones.

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\(^1\) A CoP is a network where all similar issues are discussed by groups of people that come together, with the aim to help each other out and learn from each other’s success and mistakes.
6. The CoP will start with modest ambitions, through a four-country community, seeking to expand as it grows stronger and to integrate other South Asian countries. It will raise awareness and develop a common understanding and an agenda to start operating at the regional level.

7. In the short run, the CoP should aim to meet in places with easy visa access to all countries, like Bangkok, with the help of FAO/Oxfam whenever possible. The CoP should be a platform for dialogue and discussion and therefore should meet more regularly. Discussions should also be accompanied by documentation and practical guidance so as to concretely help each other out and learn more about what is happening on similar issues in other countries.

8. The CoP should not be influenced for now by government representatives, corporations or donors, and therefore should not accept direct funding. It should remain a non-governmental initiative and eventually meet on an ad hoc basis with other stakeholders. Independence is very much needed, but international agents’ facilitation is welcome.

9. In the medium term, regional issues will be prioritized, while in the long term the CoP could look into aspects of multi-stakeholder dialogue and promotion of inter-governmental collaboration at the regional level.

10. The CoP will have to be coordinated and goal-oriented in order to function properly. Any future meeting should have clear goals and a clear agenda so that it promotes coherence and makes it easier for other partners to support this work and possibly join in.

11. The next meeting, to be organized on 16–17 February near Kolkata in India – a step already agreed upon at the South Asia Right to Food Conference in June in Dhaka – will be a starting point to move forward. During this meeting, a regional South Asia process will be discussed and discussions to address its capacity initiated.

12. If possible, with the help of FAO, the next meeting in May/June could be held in Bangkok or Kathmandu. Another meeting is already planned to be held in Nepal, probably in December 2016, by the People’s SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).

13. The group decided to issue a press release in Dhaka (see Annex I) on behalf of all countries present, condemning the actions of India in relation to the blockade at the Nepal border.

**Country commitments**

**Bangladesh:** will lobby, advocate for and eventually engage with relevant stakeholders on a possible right to food act, liaising especially with the government which currently focuses on food security only and not on the right to food. Such lobbying and advocacy should ensure coordination at all levels and discussion with different stakeholders so as to increase engagement with the right to food network in Bangladesh. Other areas of focus: a civil society act; starting to engage with the parliamentary committee on food; and backing up initiatives begun in SAARC relevant for the right to food. We will participate in the meeting in February, and will show our commitment to advancing the CSO process.

**India:** the Right to Food Campaign will continue to move forward, and India is happy to look at the right to food from a more regional perspective. India is supportive of a secretariat to be placed outside of India and would be happy to provide support as needed. Concrete commitments on the levels of
participation and management of a regional movement are too early to make, also because of the nature of the campaign, which is much decentralized.

**Nepal:** wishes to continue looking forward to a future for the right to food in South Asia. It encourages hosting more right to food events and debates in the region to mobilize more countries and create capacity. However, the network will also focus on current national priorities: a right to food legislative framework, a process which should heavily involve CSOs; implementation of policies that ensure the right to adequate food; ensuring monitoring of the right to food; and continuing to work on other issues relevant to the right to food, such as land and climate change. The right to food network (with district chapters in 35 out of 75 districts) will work to strengthen its network at all levels.

**Pakistan:** during the formulation of a food security policy, CSOs are supporting the government of Pakistan. Pakistan agrees on the following outcomes and consensus: we have here achieved a general background for future bilateral and multilateral cooperation to be enhanced on issues also related to cross-border matters which can impact the right to food; seed and food banks should be part of an urgent SAARC agenda and should be established immediately; a forum where all regional countries sit together to solve issues related to food security and the right to food together is much welcome; finally, Pakistan welcomes FAO’s support and facilitation in this process.
Annex III. List of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanjay Adhikari</td>
<td>RTV (satellite television channel)</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td>Mia Masum Ahmed</td>
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<td>Rafiq Alam</td>
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<td>Ubaidullah Badol</td>
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<td>Simon Blondeau</td>
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<td>Ahmed Shafi Cawdhury</td>
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<td>Naren Das</td>
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