

# **Summary Report on Global Dialogues on the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition**



**Dhaka, Bangladesh  
June 2, 2015**

## Organised by:



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## **Introduction:**

Food security remains a priority goal for many developing countries. In order to provide a resource and reference point for countries that are aiming to strengthen and reform their national food security policies, strategies and laws, a Global Dialogue process was created to share lessons from India and Brazil.

This dialogue took place in Dhaka on June 2 with participants from Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Kenya, Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan.

## **Objectives of the Dialogues:**

The objective of the Global Dialogues meet was to focus on the national food security needs of the participating countries. India and Brazil case studies were used as a reference point for the partner countries where the latter identify the debates, challenges and lessons of resonance with the former countries' experience and learn how to deal with them at advocacy and policy levels. India and/or Brazil could then work with the partner countries by offering them assistance in strengthening their food security laws, programmes, policies and advocacy strategy.

Broadly, the Global Dialogues aimed to achieve the following:

1. To share experience and debates associated with the development of India's National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA) and Brazil's framework food security law as a learning resource for participating countries.
2. To better understand which debates, lessons and challenges from India and/or Brazil have greatest resonance for participating countries and why.
3. To gather informal expressions of interest from prospective partners in follow-up work on strengthening food security policy or law using Indian and/or Brazilian lessons and expertise.

## **Action Points:**

This section summarises to what extent the three objectives were met. It then outlines the recommendations and next steps.

To achieve these objectives, some of the suggestions that emerged from the discussions were for the civil society in all participating countries to draft a model food security Act based on their country needs. This document can then act as an advocacy tool and can be shared for consensus building within the civil society and the government so that a demand for the right to food and nutrition is created. It should be centered around the marginalized communities, minorities, be gender sensitive and should be from a rights-based perspective.

Participants from each country brainstormed on the possible options of taking the issue of food and nutritional safety and security to their governments. The idea was to understand food and nutritional safety beyond the issues concerning the agricultural sector. An attempt was made in the country group discussions to include the issues of disability groups, women's rights and to understand food security from their lens also. Countries also laid down briefly what policies, programmes and laws on food and nutritional security currently exist and where there is scope to expand and modify these. They briefly mentioned the areas where they find resonance with the Indian and Brazilian case studies and would like support from them to improvise or design their country policies accordingly. A representative from each country then presented a brief account of the points discussed in the group. A summary of these presentations is as follows:

### **Myanmar:**

#### *Current Policy Situation and Recommendation:*

- a) Till 1988, Myanmar used to have a functional public distribution system (PDS). It was run through co-operatives but was stopped due to difficult political situation in the country. **Through civil society initiatives and government's support, an effort can be made to revive the PDS.**
- b) Myanmar is a food surplus country yet there is widespread malnutrition. Taking cue from India's mid-day meal programme, **there is a possibility to explore the school meals programme in Myanmar. Government authorities in Myanmar can be made aware of how India is implementing its mid-day meal programme and what elements of the programme suit Myanmar's needs and can be implemented in the country.** This will especially be beneficial in the dry zones and hilly areas.
- c) Besides direct food provisioning, old age pension is under way as part of the social protection programmes in Myanmar. It is currently proposed only for single women. **Advocacy on this front can further link this pension scheme to food and nutritional security of this vulnerable group.**
- d) Till 2012, all land in the country was owned by the state. This is gradually changing and now farmers can access land ownership certificates. However, the existing laws on land do not recognize the needs of minorities and ethnic groups which mostly reside in the hilly regions, practice shifting agriculture and have no land documents. Land ownership is crucial to allow communities to grow their own food. **Policy intervention to look at land distribution from the food security lens can be explored in Myanmar.**
- e) The country is also debating bringing decentralization in a big way. A law in this regard has also been proposed. **New laws on rural development and decentralization can be an entry point on right to food and nutrition.**

#### *Next Steps:*

The civil society in Myanmar is scattered and inexperienced to deal with all the above mentioned reforms and debates that are ongoing in the country. India and Brazil can:

1. **Advise and help in capacity building of the civil society groups in Myanmar on how to proceed with the rural development and decentralization laws incorporating the agenda of food and nutritional security.**
2. Provide **technical support on how to draft a right to food policy.**
3. Assist in **mapping of existing food security and social protection** policies, programmes and laws in the country. This process has been initiated and once a country-map is ready, advocacy can be taken to national government.

### **Nepal:**

#### *Current Policy Situation and Recommendation:*

- a) Nepal is in the process of drafting its Constitution. The civil society groups in the country recognize this as an opportunity to make interventions to include right to adequate food and nutrition in it.
- b) The country also has draft framework legislation on the right to food. The civil society can add its comments and suggestions to make it more inclusive. The civil society proposes to introduce food security legislation through a Private Members' Bill in the Parliament. Another option to push for a comprehensive food security law is a public interest litigation, which can also be used as a tool to hold the government accountable for non-compliance.
- c) **Legalizing the safety net programmes like the PDS is also on the civil society's agenda.**
- d) Post-earthquake disaster management and land use related laws, which are connected to food security, were introduced in the Parliament. Feudal land ownership is ending in Nepal and King's land is being nationalised. Interventions can be made in the ongoing land use policy debates. This is an opportunity for the civil society in the country to push for land reforms keeping in mind food security of the concerned population/community.

#### *Next Steps:*

1. The participants from Nepal **found Brazil's civil society's role in formulating and implementing the Zero Hunger Strategy and bringing out the framework law on food security** interesting and they would like to replicate it in Nepal.
2. Taking cue from the Indian case study, **Nepal hopes to convert its welfare programmes on food security into rights-based entitlements.**
3. Mapping of existing food security and social protection policies, programmes and laws in the country has been initiated. Once a country-map is ready, advocacy can be taken to national government.
4. **The civil society in Nepal can be advised on how to make significant interventions in the ongoing policy debates** mentioned above.

### **Bangladesh:**

#### *Current Policy Situation and Recommendation:*

- a) Prime Minister has made commitments to ensure food security in the country but unless it takes shape of a policy the civil society is not very hopeful that it will be implemented. **To push for framework law to target hunger and malnutrition drawing from the Brazilian experience is on the civil society's agenda for which they need a concrete action plan.**
- b) The Law Commission in Bangladesh is interested in ensuring food safety and this is an opportunity for the civil society to push a food security draft as an advocacy tool. **The Law Commissioner is also planning a visit to India to understand how the country implements its NFSA. This opportunity can be used by the civil society in India to work with Bangladesh in assisting a policy on food security that fits their needs and can yet find resonance in the issues India struggles with.**
- c) The civil society is concerned about how to deal with hidden hunger that often goes unrecorded. The Bangladesh government is silent on the issue. The civil society feels there is a need for an integrated statutory response to starvation and accountability for starvation in the country laws. **Indian civil society grapples with similar issues with the state and central governments here and the two countries can take advocacy forward on this collectively.**
- d) Budget for social safety net is underutilized and there is a lack of coordination between ministries.

*Next Steps:*

- a) The civil society representatives from Bangladesh want to **understand the role of social protection under the right to food for which representatives from India can guide them.** The coverage of social protection and safety net schemes in Bangladesh is not adequate and a shift in perspective – from welfare to rights based approach – is needed. The Planning Commission in Bangladesh has taken initiative for safety net strategies and advocacy at that level can help in bringing a comprehensive law on food security.
- b) The **representatives from FIAN International can guide the civil society in Bangladesh on how civil society and governments can coordinate** like in the Brazilian model.
- c) Mapping of food related laws, policies and programmes will help identify the loopholes in them. Corrective steps through advocacy at the government ministries and departments can then be taken forward more precisely. The policy mapping has already started with various civil society groups.

***Pakistan:***

- a) Over 58 per cent of population is food insecure in Pakistan. There is a need to identify and map which government programmes on food security are being implemented.
- b) **Food distribution through a government programme is one possible area that can be explored in Pakistan** along with a comprehensive livelihood option for long-term impact on food needs of the vulnerable population.

- c) The existing national agriculture food security policy in Pakistan is focused on food production. This needs to be expanded through advocacy at the government level.

**Progress so far:**

A detailed mapping exercise of policies, laws and programmes related to food security is required from each of the partner countries to know what the current situation is and in what direction advocacy and capacity building work can be taken forward. To achieve this, a detailed matrix has been shared with each of the country partners by the CES. The advocacy at the state level along with CES representatives' support can begin as soon as the mapping exercise is complete.

**Background:**

India and Brazil are two major emerging economies which have taken some major legislative and programmatic steps to battle hunger and malnutrition and to expand food security and the right to food in their respective countries. Brazil has a Zero Hunger programme, a human rights based National Food and Nutritional Security Framework Law and the right to food as a constitutional right. The India Parliament, on the other hand, enacted the National Food Security Act.

In the course of this journey to bring legislation on food security, these countries witnessed several debates on hunger, starvation, malnutrition, poverty, social protection and the role state plays in eradicating these. With the idea of sharing some of these debates with policy makers and policy advocates from South Asian countries that face similar challenges, the Centre for Equity Studies, India along with FIAN International, Germany organized the first Global Dialogues on the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition in Dhaka, Bangladesh on June 2, 2015. The event, supported by UK Aid and IPE Global through their Knowledge Partnership Programme, presented the case studies and challenges India and Brazil faced in passing legislation on the right to food in their countries. The meet was attended by over 65 participants from Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and India.

The Indian case study was presented by Mr. Harsh Mander, Director, CES and Special Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court to monitor the implementation of the right to food act in the country. He summed up the discussions on the right to food law in India that unfolded in 12 years in ten debates. Some of the debates are whether the state should provide food to its population at all or should it leave it to the free markets where people buy social security. Should the social protection duties of state be embedded in law or should these just be in the form of programmes? Should the entitlements be given in cash or in kind and should these be universal or targeted?

As a result of 2001 public interest litigation and a long civic activism, India's national food security law, called the National Food Security Act, was finally passed in 2013 after much curtailment by the Cabinet and the Parliamentary Committees. It transformed the ongoing food provisioning of subsidised rations and child feeding programmes into legal entitlements.

The Brazil's journey in passing the right to food law was presented by Dr. Flavio Luiz Schieck Valente, Secretary General of FIAN International, who explained how from an oppressive history of military dictatorship for 25 years and land grabbing in the 1960's and 1970's, strong civil society movements and advocacy in Brazil managed to bring a state sponsored country-wide zero hunger strategy in 2003.

In 2002, the new government in Brazil came to power on a big mandate to achieve a target in four years where all Brazilians could eat three meals a day. In 2006, a framework law on the national food security was passed to achieve the same. In 2010, the right to food was included in the Constitution under Article 6 as per which the government now has to allocate a part of the budget to guarantee the implementation of the right. A conglomerate of civil society groups and federal government ministries, state departments and municipalities are working together under 'Consea' to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in the country.