



**GROW**

FOOD. JUSTICE. PLANET.

# NOURISH SOUTH ASIA

Grow a Better Future for Food Justice

September 2011



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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>BPL</b>	India's Below Poverty Line survey classification
<b>CARP</b>	Bangladesh's proposed Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme
<b>CLIS</b>	Pakistan's Crop Loan Insurance Scheme
<b>CSRL</b>	Bangladesh's Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods
<b>DCF</b>	Sri Lanka's Development Communication Foundation
<b>DMC</b>	Disaster Management Centre
<b>EGP</b>	Bangladesh's 100-day Employment Generation Programme
<b>EGPP</b>	Employment Generation Program for the Poorest
<b>FAO</b>	United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FRA</b>	India's Forest Rights Act, 2006 officially referred to as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
<b>GLOFs</b>	Glacial Lake Outburst Floods
<b>GHGs</b>	Greenhouse gases
<b>IAASTD</b>	International Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology for Development
<b>ICRISAT</b>	International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Peoples
<b>IDES</b>	Nepal's Integrated Development Society
<b>IGNOAPS</b>	India's Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
<b>LAPA</b>	Local Adaptation Plan of Action
<b>LDCs</b>	Least developed countries
<b>MGNREGA</b>	India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005
<b>MoEF</b>	India's Ministry of Environment and Forests
<b>NAPA</b>	National Adaptation Programme of Action
<b>NCCP</b>	Pakistan's National Climate Change Policy
<b>NFSM</b>	India's National Food Security Mission
<b>PBM</b>	Pakistan's Bait ul Mal Food Support Programme
<b>PDS</b>	India's Public Distribution System
<b>PFDS</b>	Bangladesh's Public Food Distribution System
<b>SAARC</b>	South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation
<b>SAFSR</b>	SAARC Food Security Reserve
<b>SFB</b>	SAARC Food Bank
<b>SRI</b>	System of Rice Intensification
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation
<b>WWF</b>	World Wildlife Fund





**1**

# **INTRODUCTION**



*Not only is the persistence of widespread undernourishment in (South Asia) — more than in all other regions in the world — quite extraordinary, so is the silence with which it is tolerated, not to mention the smugness with which it is sometimes dismissed.*

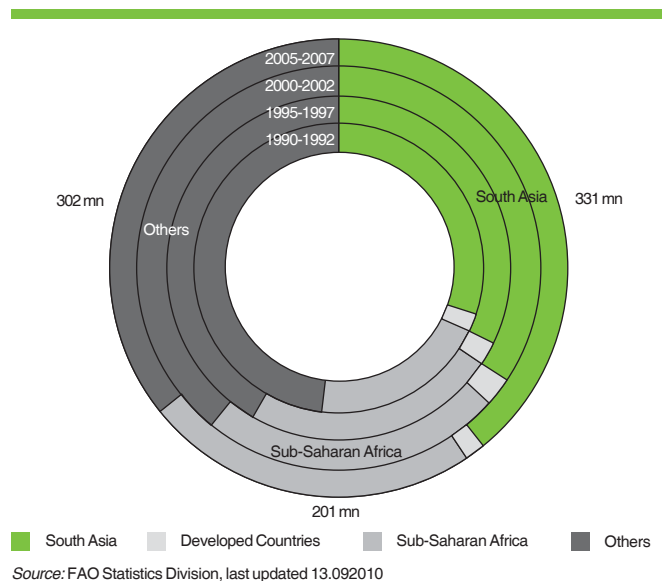
Amartya Sen, 1998  
Economist<sup>1</sup>

Forty percent of the world's hungry lived in South Asia, even before the food price crisis of 2008 (Figure 1). Hunger silently stalks the entire region, from the steep mountain slopes of Nepal to the dry, arid plains of southern Afghanistan. Although large-scale famines have largely been kept at bay, millions of poor people are like Bangladeshi farmer Azizul Islam (Box 1), unable to afford two square meals a day and left literally clutching at straws.

Deaths due to sheer starvation are also not uncommon. Children are the most vulnerable. In homes, nutritional rehabilitation centres and hospitals, unreported by the media, every single day more than 2000 children die of hunger in India alone.<sup>2</sup>

As the Nobel laureate and former honorary president of Oxfam International, Amartya Sen argues, 'the paradox is that there is hunger amidst plenty'. Since the Green Revolution of the seventies, South Asia largely produces enough to feed itself. But it has not yet been able to wipe out mass hunger.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: South Asia has the world's highest number of undernourished people, 1990-2007**



The recent tide of farmer suicides and agitations against land acquisitions in India is also symbolic of a wider agrarian crisis which has gripped the region. On the one hand, in the next forty years, South Asia's population will increase by a third and, with rising incomes, demand for food is expected to sky-rocket.

Above: Oxfam beneficiaries from the Dadeldhura district of Western Nepal who have been involved in the livelihoods programme in the area hold some of the products they have produced. (Nepal 2011) Jisu Mok/ Oxfam



But on the other hand, productivity from the resource-intensive Green Revolution agriculture has reached a plateau. Incessant diversion of fertile land for non-farm activities, depletion of ground water tables and declining budgetary support, have pushed South Asian agriculture to the brink.

Climate change threatens to exacerbate these resource constraints in a region where 60 percent of farming is rain-fed. Even the most optimistic of projections indicate that average crop yields could plummet and the frequency and severity of disasters increase multi-fold. The prognosis for regional food security is dire.

The injustice of it all is that the world's poorest people in South Asia – those least responsible for polluting the planet and with fewest resources to protect themselves – are being systematically pushed to the limits of subsistence. One-third of Bangladesh, for example, could be submerged by rising sea levels by 2050.

And the impacts of the 2008 food and financial crisis have only made matters worse. At its peak, more than 100 million people across South Asia were added to the

ranks of the hungry — the highest in four decades.<sup>4</sup> And the deprivation of those already poor has deteriorated even more.<sup>5</sup>

## WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Fortunately, there is a silver lining. The combined eruptions of the food, financial, agrarian and nutrition crises have brought to public attention the magnitude of the hidden iceberg of hunger. Media channels, parliamentary debates, and even regional films — after decades of turning a blind eye — are finally paying heed to the depth of undernourishment which engulfs the region.

And with the recent establishment of democracy in Afghanistan and Nepal and the end of prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka, unprecedented vistas have also opened to initiate long-pending structural changes. Never before has the fierce urgency and opportunity of now been more evident.

South Asian leaders need to rise up to this challenge with visionary fervour and concrete initiatives before the pounding impact of climate change further weakens the fragility of South Asian food and agrarian systems.

**Table 1: A balance sheet on food justice priorities and initiatives across South Asia**

	What has progressed	What remains behind
<b>Afghanistan</b>	In recent years, economic growth has been impressive (22.5 percent in 2009–2010). <sup>1</sup>	35 percent of Afghan households are below the food poverty line and half the children under the age of five are stunted. <sup>6</sup>
	Wild plants which increase seasonal food security of poor households have captured regional export markets: <i>hing</i> (asafoetida) trades at over \$45m and liquorice at \$7m.	Afghanistan remains the world's largest producer of opium which contributes to 50 percent of GDP. <sup>7</sup>
	In a good agricultural year, Afghanistan is 90 percent self-sufficient in cereal production. Well developed traditional practices of local food processing and home storage exist in mountain communities.	Poor farmers and pastoralists are the most vulnerable to climate change, and the over-dominance of water-guzzling wheat, which forms 80 percent of cereal production, <sup>8</sup> increases their vulnerability.
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia which has succeeded in reducing child malnutrition — from 56 to 43 percent from 1996 to 2009. <sup>9</sup>	Following widespread labour unrest in 2010, the government doubled the minimum wage for 2.5 million garment workers, but it remains one of the lowest in the world.
	In the last 28 years, Bangladesh has increased foodgrain production from 11 to 39 million metric tonnes.	There were widespread protests recently against progressive moves by the government to ensure equal property rights for women.
	Bangladesh is considered to be one of the most active countries in terms of planning and action on climate change, with a NAPA developed in 2005, and National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2008).	By 2050 floods or drought are expected to affect more than 60 million people each year in Bangladesh alone. <sup>10</sup>

Contd...

	What has progressed	What remains behind
India	Within five years, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has expanded to provide work to 53 million households — roughly 33 percent of India’s rural population in 2009–10. <sup>11</sup>	The current draft National Food Security legislation is grossly diluted <sup>13</sup> and needs to be substantially strengthened to ensure its universal applicability. <sup>14</sup>
	The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2007, is a milestone in enabling tribal communities to manage the resources of forests in which they have lived for generations.	Even after decades of land reforms in India, 41 percent of the rural population are effectively landless. <sup>15</sup>
	In 2010 India initiated a new carbon tax (levy) on coal producers which is expected to raise \$ 535m to fund renewable energy. <sup>12</sup>	The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 forces farmers to hand over land for undefined ‘public interest’ and needs to be immediately repealed.  India had set aside 100 million acres for <i>jatropha</i> cultivation (although in practice, 85 percent of farmers have already stopped its cultivation). <sup>16</sup>
Pakistan	Pakistan’s New Labour Policy 2010 has raised the minimum wage for 50 million workers.	In Pakistan, the poverty rate has officially jumped from 24 to 38 percent between 2005 and 2009. <sup>17</sup>
	In Sindh province, which has 62 percent landlessness, the Pakistani government has initiated a bold programme to redistribute state-owned land to landless women.	Less than half of all rural households own agricultural land, while the top 2.5 percent of households own 40 percent of all land. <sup>18</sup>
	Pakistan’s environment ministry has cleared the draft of its first national climate change policy (NCCP) with 120 policy measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation.	Sindh Province in southern Pakistan – the region worst-affected by the floods –suffers from disproportionately high rates of child malnutrition even before the 2010 floods. <sup>19</sup>  An Oxfam GB survey reveals that eight months after the 2010 floods, seventy percent of victims surveyed want reconstruction efforts to generate more jobs and provide them with guaranteed employment. <sup>20</sup>

Opposite: Buddhaji Pingla (28yrs, husband) and Suman Buddhaji Pingla (24yrs, wife) with their two sons Harshad Buddhaji Pingla (6) and Mukesh Buddhaji Pingla (3). Oxfam partner SAKAV, assisted this family in getting access to this land for agricultural use. They are in an field growing eggplant. (India 2010) Chris Johnson/OxfamAus

Contd...

	What has progressed	What remains behind
<b>Nepal</b>	The government plans to make nutrition a key element of its upcoming national health plan and use an already established network of 50,000 female health volunteers to combat malnutrition. <sup>21</sup>	Nearly half of Nepal’s children under five suffer from malnutrition. <sup>23</sup>
	One-third of Nepal’s population participates in community forestry, directly managing more than 1 million hectares of natural forest, or one-fourth of Nepal’s forest area. <sup>22</sup>	In Nepal, only 3.1 percent of dalits have more than 1.02 hectares of the land. <sup>24</sup>
	In 2010, the government finalised its NAPA and the local adaptation programme of action (LAPA), which set out the country’s strategy and action plan to climate change.	The NAPA needs to implement long-term programmes to benefit marginalized and vulnerable communities.
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	In the last twenty years alone, concerted action has ensured that child underweight rates have declined by one-quarter and stunting by three-quarters. <sup>25</sup>	Malnutrition affects more than half the children in areas of the East and the North which have been ravaged by 30 years of civil war. <sup>28</sup>
	Post the land-redistribution and nationalisation of plantations in the 1970s, about 60 percent of the country’s tea is produced by small farmers. <sup>26</sup>	The Sri Lankan Seed Act, 2003, which requires mandatory registered seeds, works against the interests of farmers to market their home-grown seeds.
	The government has recently developed a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for 2011–2016. <sup>27</sup>	Implementation of climate change adaptation is in its infancy.



## SEEDS OF CHANGE

The path forward is clear. Piecemeal measures won't do. Sri Lanka as a regional torch-bearer has demonstrated that it is entirely possible to achieve a far greater measure of food justice even with limited resources. In the last twenty years alone, with concerted action it has ensured that child underweight rates have declined by one-quarter and stunting by three-quarters.<sup>29</sup>

Although many countries have witnessed sporadic successes, (Table 1) the time has come to draw lessons from the mixed bag of experiences and prioritise a comprehensive range of policies and initiatives to achieve sustainable food justice. Governments and civil society across the region need to share a vision and forge a consensus with steadfast political commitment to put food justice at the very top of the policy agenda.

The time to act is now. The lives and livelihoods of millions of South Asia's impoverished masses are at stake. Oxfam believes that to achieve this goal, at the very least governments across South Asia need to urgently prioritise the following steps:

**1. Protect the universal right to food:** Reduce vulnerability by creating a minimum social protection floor to prevent people from falling into hunger.

- Enact justiciable<sup>30</sup> legal rights to food and employment guarantees;
- Effectively implement an integrated array of adequately financed and inflation-indexed universal entitlements to protect food security;
- Create a dedicated administrative cadre to implement food schemes and redress grievances;
- Ensure that government programmes prioritise the needs of children and women, especially from marginalised communities and in conflict prone areas.

**2. Support smallholder farmers:** Build a new agricultural future by prioritising the needs of smallholder food producers — where the major gains in productivity, sustainability, poverty eradication and resilience can be achieved.

- Prioritise land reform and re-distribution of land, and support poor people's rights to land and other assets essential for productive livelihoods, especially for women;
- Increase agricultural investments that benefit smallholder farmers, especially women;
- Support agro-ecological, climate-resilient and sustainable agricultural techniques including sustainable irrigation;
- End forced 'land grabs' and forced 'acquisitions' both within and outside South Asia.

**3. Adapt to and mitigate climate change:** Work towards a new ecological future, by mobilising investments and shifting behaviours to achieve equitable distribution of scarce resources.

- Invest in inclusive climate change adaptation measures;
- Mitigate climate change by pursuing sustainable pathways to cutting carbon emissions;
- Dismantle subsidies and targets for biofuel production.

**4. Extend regional cooperation:** Forge a new era of regional co-operation in agriculture and food security.

- Operationalise the South Asian Food Bank as a multilateral grain reserve;
- End regressive 'export bans' especially among regional neighbours.

**2**

**THE AGE OF  
CRISIS: HUNGER  
AMIDST PLENTY**



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*Public memory is short. [They have] forgotten the tragedy that was 1943... the conditions under which the respectable, inoffensive, decent, law-abiding citizens of Bengal died ....*

The Villager (a pseudonym)  
Famine or Plenty, 1946<sup>31</sup>

---

In 1943 Bengal experienced one of the worst famines in South Asian history when three million people died within a span of months.<sup>32</sup> Since independence, however, public pressure in the thriving democracies of South Asia has ensured that large-scale famines have become politically untenable.<sup>33</sup> But these dynamic

nation-states have yet not been able to wipe out mass hunger and malnutrition. To this day, South Asian children are twice as likely to be malnourished as those in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>34</sup>

This chapter analyses three overlapping strands of this puzzling, structurally entrenched malaise.

First, the equity challenge: why has South Asia failed in the political and administrative challenge of redistribution to eliminate mass hunger? Second, the production challenge: will food availability continue to remain plentiful and can production keep pace with the projected population expansion in the next forty years? Lastly, the resilience challenge: does the food system in South Asia have the resilience to withstand the imminent shocks and challenges of the future, especially in terms of the onslaught of climatic change?

## A.

# The equity challenge

It is a century-old home-grown tradition in Mumbai city, India's commercial capital. Every day with almost miraculous 'six sigma'<sup>35</sup> efficiency, five thousand semi-literate *dabbawallas*<sup>36</sup> zig-zag across the city to collect and deliver more than 175000 freshly cooked lunch boxes. If only these miracle men could be deployed to end hunger in every home across South Asia.

For decades, South Asian governments have failed to conquer the knotty political challenge of food distribution. Excess and scarcity seem to be two faces of the same malaise. The root of this problem lies in a largely disempowered population which is confronted with a relentless surge of unequal distribution — of food, land and power.

### FOOD IN FEW HANDS

Ironically, even in the midst of the food price crisis in 2008–9, government food stocks in most South Asia countries were above the buffer norm.<sup>37</sup> Economist Jean Drèze's graphic description a decade ago of India's '*mountains of foodgrains*', in state warehouses which '*if they are laid in a row, would stretch more than a million kilometres, taking us to the moon and back*',<sup>38</sup> holds true to this day (Figure 2).<sup>39</sup> Even the Indian Supreme Court has admonished the government for excess foodgrains rotting in granaries.<sup>40</sup> But little has changed.<sup>41</sup> Food continues to remain concentrated in just a few hands across the breadth of South Asia.

## FOOD PRICES ARE PERCHED ON A HIGHER THRESHOLD

The twin food and financial crises have left an indelible impact by exacerbating inequalities. And the food price spikes are far from over. 2011 has brought on a new wave of price increases, though of a lower magnitude. Two unexpected floods which hit Sri Lanka's main rice production areas destroyed 15 percent of the harvest.<sup>42</sup> Prices in South Asia's largest rice buyer, Bangladesh, rose to a record high in January 2011, because of low levels of public stocks.<sup>43</sup>

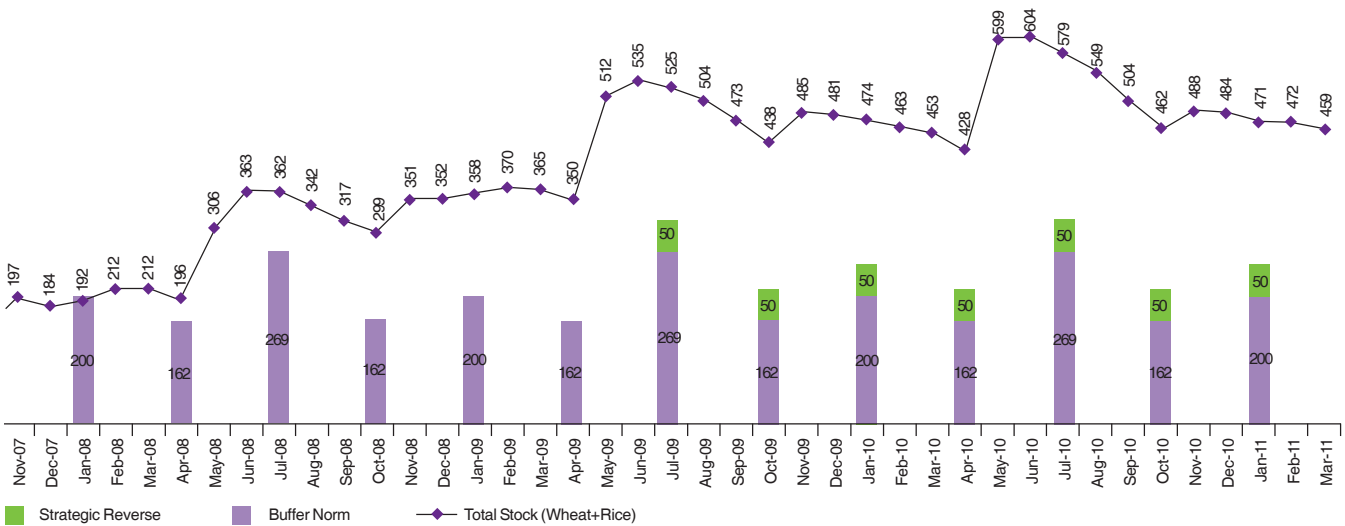
Today, even as world prices have declined significantly, food prices seem to have settled on a higher threshold across South Asia (Figure 3),<sup>44</sup> In fact, in local

currencies of rupees, taka or afghani, people are paying more for food than at the height of the 2008 crisis.<sup>45</sup> The era of cheap food seems to be over for good.

Poor people are the most affected by this volatility. Though three-quarters of South Asia's poor live in rural areas,<sup>46</sup> and are largely food producers, most are net purchasers of food.<sup>47</sup> Food remains the biggest item in their household budgets. It is as high as 50 percent in South Asia compared with 17 percent in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Food price inflation is therefore highly regressive — as it hurts the poor the most.<sup>49</sup>

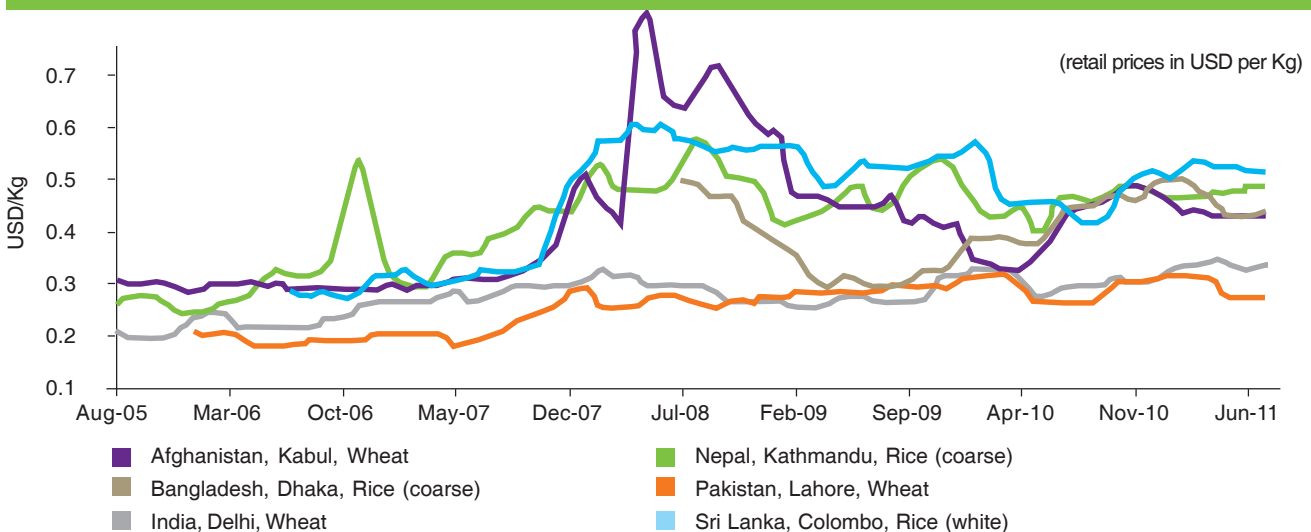
In desperation, many poor families have been forced to draw on their meagre savings, sell assets, mortgage land and take usurious loans. Others have limited their

**Figure 2: Indian foodgrain stocks exceed buffer norms and strategic reserve requirements, 2007-11**



Source: Food Corporation of India, [fciweb.nic.in/upload/Stock5.pdf](http://fciweb.nic.in/upload/Stock5.pdf)

**Figure 3: Prices of staple foodgrains remain on a higher threshold across South Asia**



Source: <http://www.fao.org/giews/pricetool2/>



food intake.<sup>50</sup> In the hunger months<sup>51</sup> Suna Devi Koli, a 38-year-old dalit mother in Nepal, increasingly feeds her children *fado*, (undernourished flour slurry).<sup>52</sup> But with the compounded impact of years of relentless food emergencies (Figure 4), many poor households like Azizul Islam's (Box 1) have almost exhausted all their available coping strategies.

## MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES REMAIN LAST ON THE BREADLINE

Hunger is usually a product of sustained poverty, discrimination and neglect.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, a three-decade tracking across rural India has revealed that poverty is increasingly becoming hereditary and geographically concentrated.<sup>54</sup> And the systemic discrimination faced by marginalised communities has become almost endemic.

More than 250 million *dalits*<sup>55</sup> across South Asia live precariously.<sup>56</sup> Despite being unconstitutional, untouchability has acquired new guises. For example, *dalit* farmers in 35 percent of villages surveyed across India were found to be barred from selling their produce in local markets.<sup>57</sup> The *musahars*,<sup>58</sup> in

particular, who rarely own land, are among the most food insecure. In Nepal, the *madhesi dalits* are also severely marginalised.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, forest dwellers and tribal populations across South Asia are also among the most acute victims of food insecurity (Box 2). Nutritional indicators bear testimony to this consistent deprivation (Figure 5)<sup>60</sup>.

## WOMEN AND CHILDREN GET CRUMBS

The traditional family structure across South Asia also breeds subtle forms of social exclusion and deprivation. Women often eat last and the least. The food price hikes have made this practice of 'maternal buffering' worse. Maleka Khatun, a Bangladeshi mother is at her wits end: '*What will we cook in this situation? Where will we get money? Everything is costly. Most days I keep my stomach empty to feed my children and husband.*'<sup>66</sup>

From day one, the odds are also heavily stacked against South Asian children. Almost one-third of children in the region are born with low birth weight.<sup>67</sup> Today, 57 percent of the world's underweight children live in South Asia.

### Box 1: 'Long March' for sustainable rural livelihoods in Bangladesh

Azizul Islam has turned his back on farming. Instead, he now laboriously pulls a rickshaw on the streets of Dhaka.

Azizul owns only one bigha of land. Although in the midst of the food crisis, he had cultivated *irri* paddy, after the harvest he realized that his production costs were higher than the market price!

He was forced to sadly confront the truth, '*the excessive prices of fertiliser and fuel have destroyed the backbone of farmers. I took loans for cultivation but could not pay them back. What will I do? If I keep paddy for my own consumption how will I meet other expenditures?*'

He has a son and two daughters, all of whom go to school. But their future seems bleak. *I am in a dire condition. It is becoming more difficult to buy books and pens. In fact I cannot even manage food twice a day.*'

Every day, he remains preoccupied with one and only one thought — the survival of his family. Azizul is afraid, '*If this price hike continues, we will surely die of starvation.*'

Smallholder farmers like Azizul are bearing the brunt of the food crisis. After two years, food prices have stabilised on a higher threshold. And the high costs

of inputs are squeezing their income. As net buyers of food, their rising cost of living is depleting their standard of living. And many have been forced to sell their land as the last resort for survival.

Bangladeshi farmers desperately need input subsidies and social protection to tide them over the crisis. Azizul needs to be supported to return to the land of his forefathers. For that it is essential to once again ensure that smallholder farming is economically viable.

In March 2011, Oxfam's partner Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL), a broad-based alliance of nearly 200 organizations, organised a 'Long March' which converged in Dhaka after holding rallies and human chains in 30 district headquarters and *upazilas* on their way. The campaign sought to give voice to the petitions of 1 million rural Bangladeshi smallholders and landless labourers.

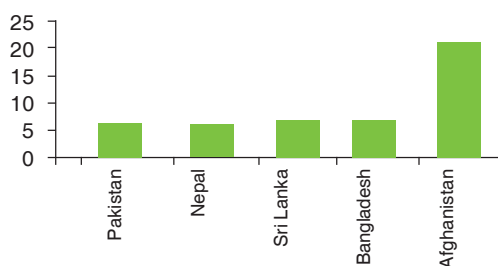
Their main demand was for the adoption and implementation of a Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP), mainstreamed within national policy frameworks. The CARP contains an integrated approach to support diversified rural livelihoods across Bangladesh's 30 agro-ecological zones with a focus on food security, employment and economic growth.

Source: Oxfam GB, 2008, *The Frontlines of Hunger*, New Age, 16 October 2008 [Photo: ID 47417]

Afghanistan, in particular, still bears the wounds of decades of conflict and two-thirds of its children are moderately or severely stunted (Figure 6).<sup>68</sup>

One of the reasons for this is that young mothers are ill-equipped. In Bangladesh, for example, two-thirds of girls are married as teenagers.<sup>69</sup> And these underage, often illiterate, malnourished and impoverished mothers are more likely to perpetuate the inter-generational cycle of hunger.

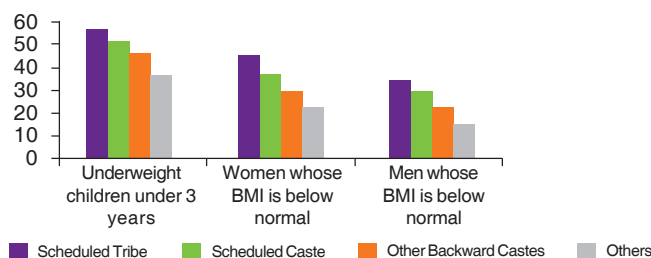
**Figure 4: Duration of Current Food Emergencies (in Number of Years)**



Source: FAO (2010). "When Emergencies Last for Decades: How to Improve Food Security in Protracted Crises." Economic and Social Perspectives Policy Brief 7, February 2010. Rome: FAO

South Asia is also the only region in the world where gender disparities are prevalent even in child malnutrition.<sup>70</sup> There is a clear link between food insecurity and gender inequity.<sup>71</sup> Dr Khaled Nawaz, a district health officer in Pakistan, describes the association more bluntly, '*In our society, men are given a higher priority than women, so we see more malnourished girls than boys.*'<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 5: Marginalised tribes and castes have higher levels of malnutrition in India, 2005-6**



Source: Fred Arnold, Sulabha Parasuraman, P. Arokiasamy, and Monica Kothari. 2009. Nutrition in India. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), India, 2005-06. Mumbai: International Institute for Population Science; Calverton, Maryland, USA: ICF Macro.

\*men and women refer to ever-married adults in the 15-49 years age group.

## Box 2: Tribals in India get rights to harvest bamboo and other forest produce

The indigenous tribal *adivasis*<sup>61</sup> of India are among the most marginalised. Despite comprising only nine percent of India's population, they have been disproportionately affected in the race to modernity. In the last three decades, 55 million have been forcibly displaced<sup>62</sup> from their traditional homes and livelihoods in the name of steel mills, large dams and other so-called 'development projects'.<sup>63</sup>

Ninety percent of *adivasis* are also either absolutely landless or own marginal plots of land that provide them with little or no food security.<sup>64</sup> The Centre for Environment and Food Security in a 2005 survey found that a staggering 99 percent of tribal households face chronic hunger as they could not obtain even two square meals for even a single month in the entire year.<sup>65</sup>

But the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 has paved the way for a revolution. Officially referred to as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest

Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act and set in motion in 2007, it is a milestone in a three-decade democratic struggle to enable India's tribal communities to manage the resources of the jungles, in which they have lived for generations.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) has also taken another small step to restore the balance between the goals of conservation and human rights.

In April 2011, it gave Lekha-Mendha village in the state of Maharashtra, the right to grow, harvest and sell bamboo for the first time. This small entitlement to manage a 'minor forest produce' is expected to transform the fortunes of the village. It also shines a new beacon of light on hundreds of other tribal villages which are poised to receive similar rights.

With this progressive legislation, a more responsive state and watchful civil society, there is hope that in future conservation and human rights do not necessarily have to be at odds with each other.

Sources: J. Hardikar (2011) 'Outsider in own home, Maharashtra village wrests control of forest produce sale', *The Telegraph*, 19 May; Sebastian (2011) 'India's mineral wealth obtained by violating tribal rights, says ILO study', *India Today*, 7 February; 2011, 'Recognising Tribal Rights', *The Hindu*, 20 May

## LAND IN FEW HANDS

Two-thirds of South Asia's poor people live in a feudal rural landscape.<sup>73</sup> Here, access to land is all important for food security. But land is concentrated in a few hands, largely with men. Though absentee landlordism has been officially abolished, in practice genuine land reform and redistribution has failed across most of South Asia.<sup>74</sup>

## LANDHOLDINGS ARE ACUTELY SKEWED

The South Asian land Gini coefficient is 0.54 – which is very unequal.<sup>75</sup> Skewed landholding and the massive scale of rural landlessness are both chronic. Nearly three-quarters of all farmers in South Asia cultivate less than five acres.

The majority of farmers do not even own the lands they till. Instead, they remain bound by feudal relations of exploitation.<sup>76</sup> Eighty percent of the farming population in Pakistan, for example, are *haris* who cultivate their landlords' holdings for only a share of the harvest — a modern form of bondage.<sup>77</sup>

And millions more are also absolutely landless. In India, for example, even after decades of land reforms, 41 percent of the rural population are effectively landless.<sup>78</sup> Caste, which has regimented occupational choices for generations, also plays a role. In Nepal, for instance, the majority of *dalits* remain landless to this day. Unfortunately across South Asia the agrarian reform agenda has been flagging.

Nomadic, tribal and indigenous communities also increasingly find that their public commons are quickly

disappearing and they have less pasture to graze their livestock. The fencing of forests also curtails their freedom to forage.<sup>79</sup> Unlike India which has recently made some headway in granting forest rights (Box 2), Bangladesh *adhibashi*s<sup>80</sup> in the Chittagong Hill Tracts still continue to struggle to establish their claims on communal lands.<sup>81</sup>

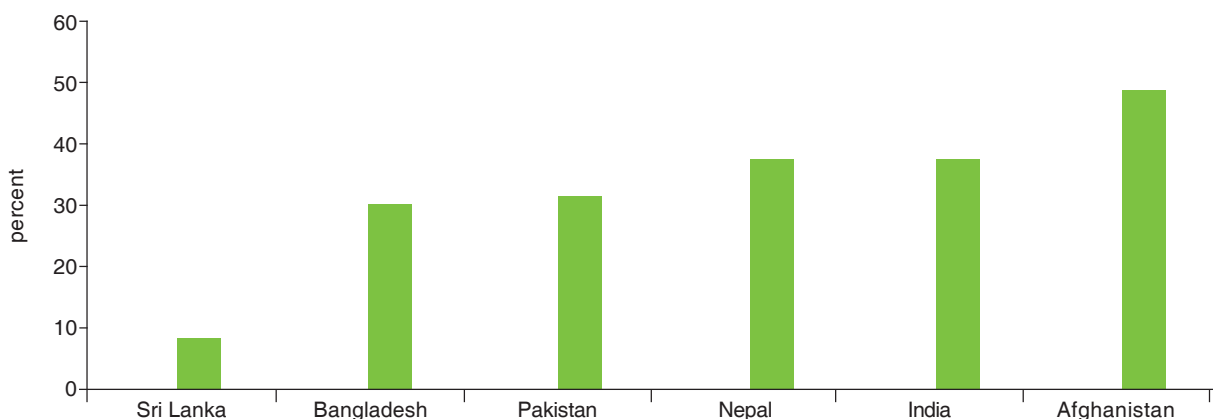
## MORE WOMEN TOIL ON THE FIELDS BUT FEW OWN LAND

Women are particularly marginalised in terms of land ownership. In Pakistan, average land holdings of male-headed households are more than twice the size of female-headed households.<sup>82</sup> Progressive initiatives by the Bangladeshi government to ensure equal inheritance rights for women have also been met with widespread protests.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, across the South Asian countryside, rural women are increasingly stepping out of their homes to work in farms as agricultural labourers. In fact, there has been a three-fold increase in women's participation in Pakistan since the eighties. In Bangladesh it has leapt by 108 percent between 1999 and 2006.<sup>84</sup> And women now form 30 percent of the agricultural labour force in India.<sup>85</sup>

But two main barriers remain. Most rural women continue to earn less than men. Worse still, despite their back-breaking labours in the fields, 46 percent of women are in fact 'contributing family members' who are unpaid.<sup>86</sup> The discrimination is so entrenched, that not only are women not recognised as farmers in school curricula,<sup>87</sup> but their critical contribution to household food security is also rarely appreciated.

**Figure 6: Stunted Children in South Asia as an indicator of chronic malnutrition (percentage of children under five of age)**



Source: WHO. 2010. Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition (latest available year)

## POWER IN FEW HANDS

The truth is that in the struggle to feed their families, poor women and men need to negotiate power imbalances at every level. Hunger is invariably a by-product of blatant marginalisation and exploitation of vulnerable families.

It is not so easy for a literate woman, for example, to be cheated out of her daily labour wages. But *Madhesi dalit* women in Nepal, for example, have a literacy rate of only 3.5 percent.<sup>88</sup> They are rarely aware of their rights to land and minimum wages, let alone empowered enough to collectively fight for them. Corruption routinely corrodes their entitlements and middlemen often eat the spoils.

## CORRUPTION CONSUMES FOOD SECURITY

Though the causes of food insecurity are deep-rooted, usually it is a story of failed governance. Often those who are least able to afford bribes are its worst victims.

All South Asian countries score badly on Transparency International's annual Corruption Index. Nepal and Pakistan rank among the worst in South Asia.<sup>89</sup> But Afghanistan performs the worst. Ordinary Afghans are now paying twice as much in bribes than two years ago.<sup>90</sup>

Social protection entitlements are particularly vulnerable. In Bangladesh, for example, almost 40 percent of workers hired in a 100-day employment programme were found to be actually not poor.<sup>91</sup> In India only 40 percent of the poorest are able to gain anything from 11 social programmes which cost the exchequer 2 percent of GDP.<sup>92</sup> The 'hoarding' of 'below poverty line' (BPL) cards by village officials to fudge records and siphon off food grains and cash is also rampant.<sup>93</sup>

The revolving door between government and business is also a threat. Three years ago, the Indian Education Ministry, for example, had to stave off severe pressure from private companies eager to replace the \$1bn 'market' for freshly cooked school meals with packaged biscuits.<sup>94</sup>



## MIDDLEMEN EAT THE CAKE

The food price crisis also drew attention to the role of traders in hoarding and speculation. Though smallholder farmers in Pakistan could have gained from the recent surges in wheat and rice prices and earned an additional \$2.7bn, in reality, this windfall was entirely pocketed by the middlemen and large landlords.<sup>95</sup>

The truth is that high retail prices on grocery shelves often do not translate into farm gate prices. There is often a huge difference between what a farmer gets for wheat and what a consumer pays for flour, even after taking into account the cost of transportation, processing, distribution and taxes. Small farmers are increasingly being pushed to the bottom of the food chain.

The onion crisis in India in January 2011, in particular, exposed the invisible role of the middlemen. Consumers had to pay 200–500 times more than the price at which they were purchased from farmers.<sup>96</sup> Middlemen usurped the high mark up.<sup>97</sup>

Also, since the overwhelming majority of farmers across South Asia are net food buyers, any prolonged hike in food prices depletes their real incomes.

## PRIORITY: CLAIM THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The scales are tipped against poor people in the battle against hunger. But they do fight back on occasion, by coming together to claim their rights. In flood-hit Pakistan in 2010, for example, there were sporadic demonstrations by farmers angry that subsidised seed and fertiliser meant for them were allegedly being sold in the open market.<sup>98</sup> India's decade-long progressive Right to Food Campaign with its many judicial and legislative successes is also testimony to the strength of collective action.

In the long run governments can ignore the power of the hungry masses only at their own peril. After all, economic superpowers cannot be built on empty bellies.<sup>99</sup>

Left: Sudha, house wife and member ADRA SHG, having lunch at her hopuse in Kandakaddu village at Cuddalore district. According to her the change in life styles have enabled people like her to have a better meal every day, the change is due to the availability of fresh water (bore well) which results in three cropping seasons in year as against one in year earlier. (India 2008) Atul Loke / Panos for Oxfam America

# B. The Production challenge

South Asian agriculture is in the grip of a crisis. Its contribution to GDP has plummeted, in part as the industrial and service sectors have grown. In India it has declined from 62 percent in 1960 to a mere 17 percent in 2011 (Figure 7).<sup>100</sup> But the crux of the problem is that more than half the population of the region continues to survive on cultivation.<sup>101</sup> Today, their plight is increasingly shrinking into oblivion.<sup>102</sup>

In desperation, a quarter of a million Indian farmers<sup>103</sup> crippled by debt have committed suicide in the last fifteen years.<sup>104</sup>

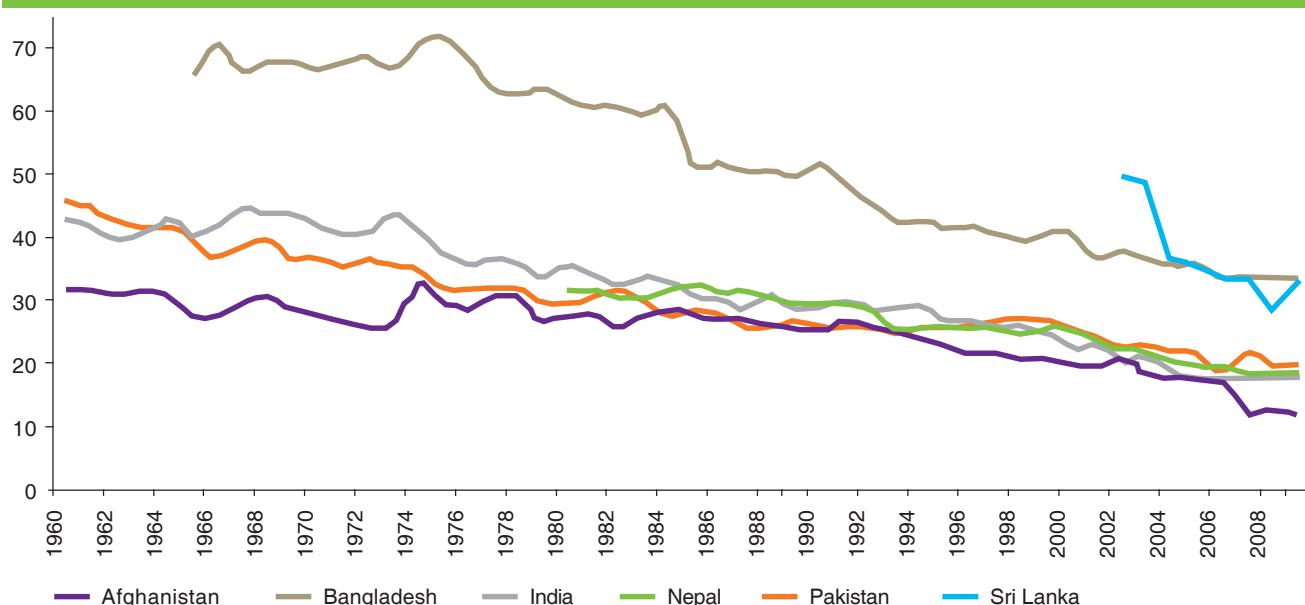
The main culprit is the mismatch between the cost of production and income, which has increasingly begun to pauperise the peasantry. In Sri Lanka, analysts argue that the cost of growing rice has exceeded the market price.<sup>105</sup> With groundwater tables plunging, loan burdens rising and smaller holdings yielding less and less, 'farming has become unviable'.<sup>106</sup>

Against these odds, can the region produce enough to feed itself in future? Will smallholders survive? And is there light at the end of the tunnel for South Asia's agrarian crisis?

## DEMAND WILL INCREASE

In the next forty years, South Asia's population is expected to increase by a third. Afghanistan, in particular, will see its population double.<sup>107</sup> In the coming decades, urbanisation, income growth and a decline in poverty are also poised to drive up demand for food.

**Figure 7: Declining share of agriculture in GDP across South Asia, 1960-2008 (percent)**



Source: World Development Indicators

## POPULATION WILL GROW AND URBANISE

Since the fifties, South Asia's population has more than tripled.<sup>108</sup> In comparison, in the next forty years, it is estimated to increase by only one-third, to 2.3 billion. But with declining agrarian yields, even the current level of food security may prove to be too difficult to maintain with more mouths to feed.

Rapid urbanisation will also play a role. Across South Asia, the urban population of net food buyers is expected to exceed those in the countryside after 2040. To add to this pressure, rapid urban spread and creeping environmental degradation will further curtail the availability of arable land to cultivate crops.<sup>109</sup>

Land-use changes and competition over water uses will impose severe constraints to meet the emerging food demand patterns of sprawling cities.<sup>110</sup> Food density maps for 2050 indicate India's northeast and Bangladesh threaten to emerge as future food security hotspots.<sup>111</sup>

## INCOMES WILL INCREASE AND FOOD HABITS CHANGE

Low incomes are one of the primary reasons for hunger and severe under-nutrition. Currently, across South Asia, 17–30 percent of the population do not consume the minimum level of globally recommended dietary energy.<sup>112</sup> But in the twenty-first century, if governments seriously invest to eradicate hunger, demand for food will increase substantially.

In the last decade, South Asia has experienced the second fastest rate of economic growth in the world.<sup>113</sup>

In the next 25 years it is further projected to grow at a steady rate of 5.5 percent.<sup>114</sup> Rural incomes, in particular, are expected to rise fast.

Propelled by increased disposable incomes, food habits usually diversify away from cereals. Projections indicate that in the next quarter century, consumption of milk and vegetables is expected to rise by 70 percent; and meat, eggs, and fish by 100 percent in the region.<sup>115</sup> Pulses, as they are a main source of protein in largely vegetarian diets in South Asia, are also crucial.

The writing is on the wall — South Asia's food production will not only need to massively expand but also transform itself to keep pace with dietary changes in future — in an increasingly uncertain climate.

## SUPPLY CONSTRAINTS WILL INCREASE

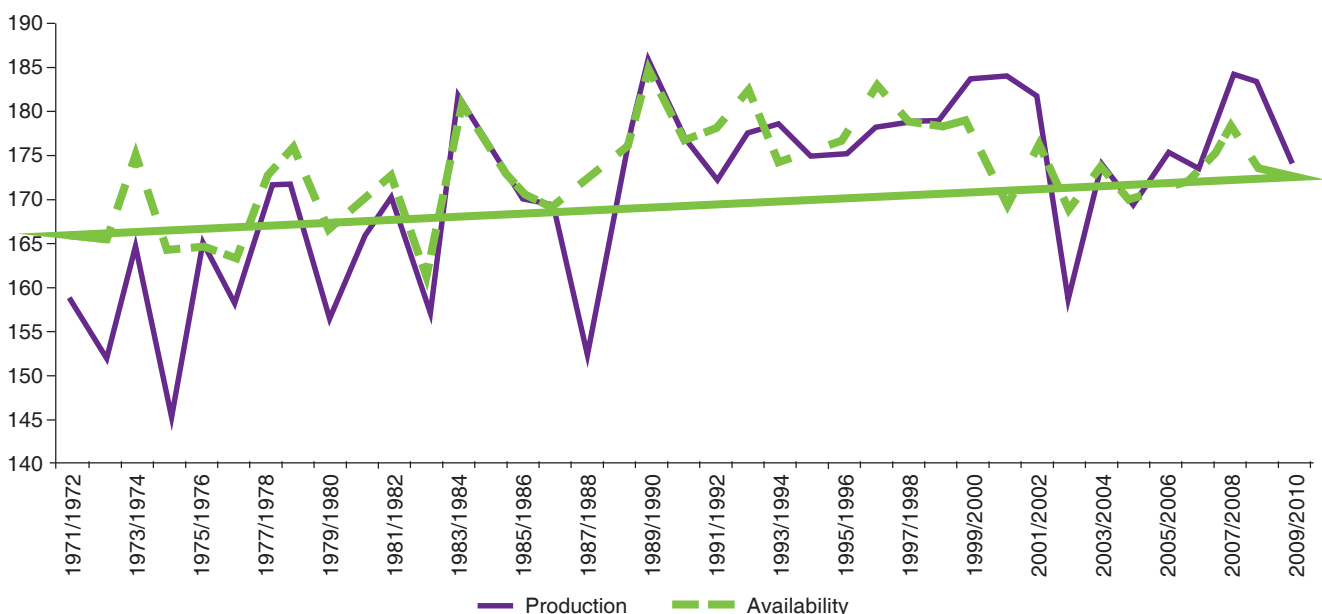
Unfortunately, agricultural productivity across South Asia is on a downward march.<sup>116</sup> Diminishing yields and depletion of water tables are the order of the day. With the decline in agricultural budgets, the future of regional food production looks bleak. These supply constraints will in time take their toll.

## YIELDS ARE FLATTENING OUT

Though food grain production has more than trebled in South Asia over the last 30–40 years,<sup>117</sup> per capita food availability struggles to keep pace (Figure 8). The productivity peaks of the Green Revolution are undeniably over (Box 3). Even as India's population burgeoned by 17 percent in the last decade, farm output has expanded at just half that rate.<sup>118</sup>

**Figure 8: Per capita food grain production and availability in South Asia: 1971-72 to 2009-10**

(in kg/person/year)



Source: Titumur and Basak (2010) Agriculture and Food Security in South Asia: A Historical Analysis and a Long Run Perspective, Unnayan Onneshan

Marginal and smallholder farmers are also facing a crisis due to increasing costs of inputs. The Green Revolution, which relied on massive use of pesticides and fertilisers, has made farmers dependent on substantial use of agro-chemicals. Fertiliser application in Bangladesh increased 890 times from 1975 to 2005.<sup>119</sup> But this has proved to be unsustainable.

Today, Sri Lanka needs to import almost all of its fertilizer, which it provides to farmers at a tenth of their commercial costs (Box 4). In 2007–8, when international fertiliser prices spiked even more dramatically than food prices, the country's fertilizer import bill shot up by 120 percent.<sup>120</sup>

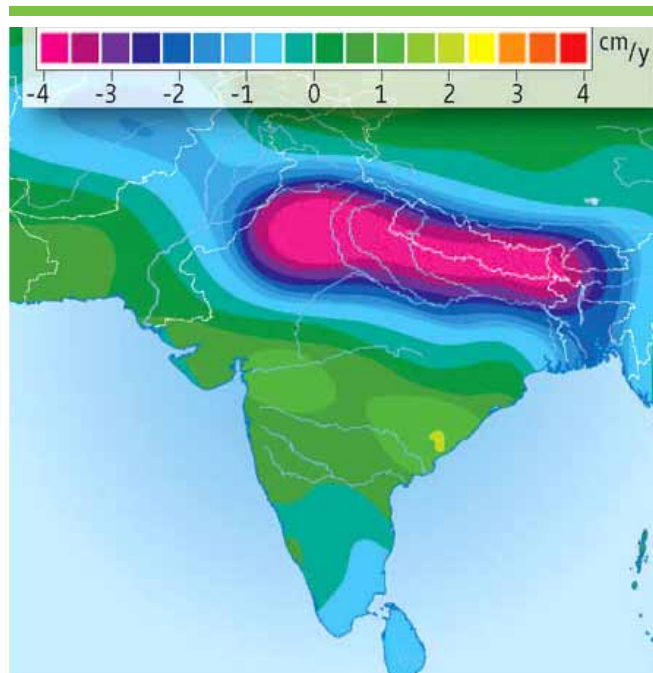
## WATER IS POLLUTED AND DRYING UP

The Green Revolution has turned sour. Its intensive farming techniques have undermined the fertility of the soil. The widespread use of fertilisers has also resulted in dangerous contamination. The continuous monoculture of rice–wheat systems in the Indo–Gangetic Plain has led to soil degradation.<sup>122</sup> Intensive irrigation and mining of ground water has also pushed water tables down to precarious levels (Figure 9).<sup>123</sup>

Across the region, nearly 95 percent of fresh water is used for agriculture.<sup>124</sup> But its management is extremely inefficient. In fact, 40 percent of fresh water diverted to agriculture in Bangladesh is wasted.<sup>125</sup> In Pakistan, poorly managed irrigation systems have already led to widespread salinity and water logging.<sup>126</sup> Even the Indian breadbaskets of Punjab and Haryana are heading towards desertification. The once lush, fertile landscape is fast turning grey.

It was only after many years of persistent campaigning by Oxfam partners in Bangladesh, the 'Save the Jamuna Campaign' and 'Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods' (CSRL), that the government commenced dredging of the Brahmaputra River to revive it as the backbone of agriculture.

**Figure 9: Satellite images of depleted groundwater tables across the South Asia breadbasket, 2009**



Source: GRACE (Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment/NASA/Tiwari, V. M., J. Wahr, and S. Swenson, 2009. Dwindling groundwater resources in northern India, from satellite gravity observations, Geophysics

### Box 3: What is the future of post-Green Revolution agriculture in South Asia?

The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s increased food production across South Asia through agricultural intensification. Cereal production grew annually by some 2.5 percent. It enabled Bangladesh to increase its foodgrain production from 11 to 39 million metric tonnes in a period of 28 years.

This laboratory-led creation of high-yield varieties was implemented in tune with massive state-subsidised irrigation and farm mechanisation. They enabled the establishment of double-cropping. To support this technological revolution, private banks were nationalised and credit channelled to rural areas. Rural electrification and irrigation were also prioritised.

But necessary institutional changes were largely ignored. The political agenda sidelined land reform. As a result, the superficial technological change reinforced the longevity of the long-term fetters to agricultural productivity.

Source: Mohanty (2008) 'The Return of Land Hunger', Essay, *Himal South Asian*, April; Gyawali (2008) 'Red Star over South Asia', October; Goswami (2010) 'Industrial Farming versus the Peasantry', October 2010, UN ESCAP (2000) 'State of Environment in Asia and the Pacific'.

The recent slackening of yields across South Asia has been due to two factors.

First, the environmental constraints of agricultural intensification: Excessive, and often inappropriate, usage of chemicals has led to severe pollution. Intensification has also contributed to land degradation and water scarcity.

Second, the decreased political support for agriculture: Increasing costs of cultivation have led to higher indebtedness, crop failures and incapacity to face price shocks. Liberalisation of the agricultural sector has further driven farmers to the edge.

In the post-Green Revolution era, agrarian production needs to be resurrected across South Asia with a focus on sustainability. More investment is necessary in agro-ecologically appropriate alternative methods which could include more efficient irrigation, water harvesting, agro-forestry, intercropping, and organic manures.<sup>121</sup>





#### Box 4: Sri Lanka needs chemical-free 'organic' home gardens

Nestled in the hills of Warakapola, in the central province of Sri Lanka, are some of the poorest people in the country. People here battle deforestation and soil erosion, water shortages and infertile soil. For many, growing enough food to eat has been a daily challenge. But many have found a unique way to survive, regenerate their land and live free from poverty and exploitation.

Quintos Andesinghe, from Pillanduwa village is one of them. He walks home from his garden, his face beaded with sweat, a warm toothy smile spread across his face. In his hands, he holds a metal dish piled high with freshly picked vegetables: purple eggplants, bright green bitter melons and long yellow snake-beans. *'We don't buy any vegetables from the shops now.'* he says.

Quintos's model 'organic' home garden was created with training and support from Oxfam Australia partner Development Communication Foundation (DCF). These 'home gardens', roughly of 50 sq km each, are small plots where a variety of vegetables are cultivated throughout the year. Since the plots are next to the home, kitchen waste such as rice water, vegetable scraps, waste water and cooking ash can be composted in the garden.

Home gardens have also recently gained centre stage in the Sri Lankan government's food policy. In

March 2011, President Mahinda Rajapaksa launched *'Divi Neguma'*, an ambitious programme coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Development to promote food self-sufficiency across one million households. The government plans to provide each family with 4–5 varieties of hybrid vegetables and distribute small packets of fertilizer alongside.

However, Sarath Fernando, Secretary of Movement for Land and Agricultural Reforms (MONLAR), a proponent of organic agriculture, is sceptical of the undue use of the agro-chemical fertilisers. The Sri Lankan Seed Act, 2003, which requires any seed sold in the market to be registered with the Director of Seed Certification in the Department of Agriculture, also works against the interests of thousands of farmers looking for a market for their home-grown seeds.

MONLAR is in favour of the more holistic approach of 'organic home gardens', which raises productivity, improves soil health, uses bio-fertilizers to control pests and promotes biodiversity by planting several plant varieties that improve food diversity. Somawathi Gunapala from Pillanduwa village is also crystal-clear about the advantages of chemical-free home gardens, *'I sell [excess vegetables] at the market fair. We have regular customers who come and buy them from us only because it is organic, poison-free food.'*

Source: Oxfam Australia <http://www.oxfam.org.au/explore/health/food-and-nutrition/helping-gardens-grow> and Batra (2011) 'Vignettes from Sri Lanka's cloud country', *Down to Earth*, 27 May, <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/vignettes-sri-lankas-cloud-country?page=0,13>

## AGRICULTURE BUDGETS ARE DECLINING

To make matters worse, globally public spending on agriculture has been sidelined in the last two decades.<sup>127</sup> In India, home to one-quarter of the world's farmers, the agricultural budget dropped dramatically in the nineties.<sup>128</sup>

Long-established state subsidies for smallholder farmers are also being systematically dismantled. In 2010, India moved to a cash subsidy scheme to replace fertiliser subsidies.<sup>129</sup> The budget for extension services has almost been wiped out.<sup>130</sup> And district agriculture research centres<sup>131</sup> have become almost moribund.<sup>132</sup>

Although Bangladesh became the first Asian country to produce a national action plan for international donor investment of \$8bn in food security in response to the

2009 L'Aquila G8 Initiative, it lacks any new path-breaking initiative.<sup>133</sup>

With declining support, it is no surprise that agriculture is underperforming across South Asia even as the price of farm inputs has sky rocketed.

## SMALLHOLDER FARMERS WILL BE SIDELINED

Despite this agrarian crisis, policy makers seem to have entirely abandoned the peasantry. Politicians, economists, scientists and bureaucrats seem to have instead pinned all their hopes on commodity exchanges, futures trading, imports, biofuels and food retail to make farming 'economically viable'. In effect, they hope global agribusinesses will save agriculture by pursuing the 'farm-to-fork' model.<sup>134</sup>

Opposite: Somawathi Gunapala, from Pillanduwa village in central Sri Lanka picks ripe snake beans from the vegetable garden she established with four other community members. (Sri Lanka 2008) Maureen Bathgate/OxfamAUS

## SMALLHOLDERS ARE BEING SIDELINED BY CORPORATIONS

Contract farming has become widespread but many small farmers have been disappointed with delayed payments, faulty seeds, informal contracts, and substandard technical assistance.<sup>135</sup>

Monsanto and other seed companies are signing agreements directly with state and provincial governments across South Asia to push their patented seeds to farmers. Pesticide manufacturers are even selling toxic pesticides that are banned internationally.<sup>136</sup> WalMart, Carrefour, and others are lobbying to open foreign direct investment (FDI) in India's \$400bn multi-brand retail sector, despite the fears of consequent large-scale job and livelihood losses.<sup>137</sup>

With rampant jobless growth and high levels of illiteracy (Figure 10) where will the displaced rural population find employment? With declining productivity, how will South Asia grow enough to feed itself? The socio-economic and political fallout of the disintegration of this agrarian foundation could well be catastrophic.<sup>138</sup>

## FERTILE LAND IS BEING DIVERTED

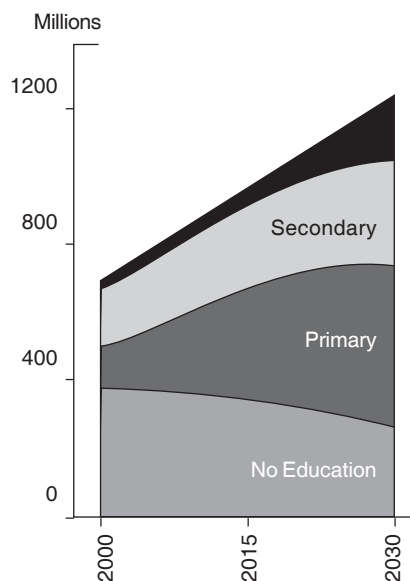
In the scorching heat of the 2011 summer, rural India is on the boil. Farmers are courting arrest to make themselves heard.<sup>139</sup> Their rage has been seething for a long time.

More than 55 million tribal peoples were forcibly evicted through land acquisitions between 1951 and 2005.<sup>140</sup> In the tribal-dominated Indian state of Chhattisgarh, a ministry of rural development report itself blamed the government and private companies for the '*the biggest grab of tribal lands after Columbus*'.<sup>141</sup>

The battle between farmers and captains of industry has also reached fever pitch. Televised debates have finally focused attention on the social injustice of forced diversion of fertile farmlands and forests for the construction of information technology parks, export processing zones, golf courses, expressways, nuclear reactors, airports, industries, biofuel plantations and residential villas.<sup>142</sup>

But the moot question with this diversion is: will South Asia still be able to feed itself in future? The Indian government estimates that since 1990 only 1.5 percent of the sown area has transitioned from farm to non-farm use. But even this would have yielded enough to feed more than 43 million hungry people every year.<sup>143</sup>

**Figure 10: Level of Education of South Asian Population Aged 20 to 65 years**



Source: Wolfgang P. Lutz (2001) 'World population in 2050: assessing the projections: discussion,' Conference Series; [Proceedings], Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

## A FEEDING FRENZY FOR FERTILE LAND

Since the 2008 crisis, South Asia governments have adopted another regressive strategy that actively sidelines the local peasantry. They have encouraged South Asian entrepreneurs to acquire land abroad.

These enterprises have joined the global race to acquire fertile arable land with vast reserves of groundwater, sometimes at throw away prices, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>144</sup> In some cases land acquisitions have displaced thousands of poverty-stricken African farmers from their ancestral villages, in countries which are already heavily dependent on food imports and food aid.<sup>145</sup>

India has become a major buyer. More than 80 Indian companies have bought land in Ethiopia alone. One of the largest is Karuturi Global, listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange,<sup>146</sup> which owns land eight times the area of Mumbai in Ethiopia.<sup>147</sup> These land acquisitions are not confined to Africa but extend to Central and South America.<sup>148</sup> Even Bangladesh has entered the fray.<sup>149</sup>

Surprisingly perhaps, in a reverse twist South Asian governments too are welcoming such large-scale land

acquisitions with open arms. Pakistan, for example, is attracting<sup>150</sup> investors<sup>151</sup> to reportedly lease six million acres, which could potentially displace 25,000 villagers.<sup>152</sup> Afghanistan too has allegedly rolled out the red carpet with 90 year leases, security, power, easy bank credit and 'simplified investment norms'.<sup>153</sup> India in turn has attracted Bahrain,<sup>154</sup> while post-conflict Sri Lanka has wooed Qatar.<sup>155</sup>

## BIOFUELS ARE DISPLACING FOOD CROPS

On its own, increasing food production will not reduce hunger. But South Asian countries which barely produce enough to feed themselves can ill afford to divert precious arable land away from the production of food crops.

The Indian government's aggressive promotion and cultivation of *jatropha* on 11 million hectares (27 million acres) of plantations, including on regular agricultural land where it will displace existing crops, including food crops, is therefore an example of an especially ill-advised policy. Its ambition to source 20 percent of all its petrol and diesel from biofuels by 2017 should be repealed.<sup>156</sup>

## PRIORITY: MEET THE PRODUCTION CHALLENGE

The core challenge for South Asia is to prioritise its own smallholder farmers and increase their productivity. Without urgent action, it is estimated that more than 17 percent of the South Asian population may face food insecurity by 2050 due to shortages of staples. Bangladesh and Nepal will be the most vulnerable.<sup>157</sup>

Despite everything said above about skewed government priorities, indifference and neglect, there are some small signs that all is not hopeless. The 2008–9 Bangladeshi budget, for example, increased spending on agriculture by a modest 4 percent<sup>158</sup> and reinstated agricultural subsidies that had earlier been eliminated.<sup>159</sup> The Sri Lankan government has also initiated a programme in the Eastern province Api Wavamu- Rata Nagamu<sup>160</sup> to enhance home gardening and promote organic fertilizers.

These small steps could mark the way forward for South Asia to reinvest in, and secure, its agricultural future.<sup>161</sup>

# C. The resilience challenge

South Asia is the world's most disaster-prone region.<sup>162</sup> At present, the region is awash with reconstruction efforts — from war-torn Afghanistan and post-conflict Sri Lanka to flood-affected Pakistan and cyclone-ravaged Bangladesh.<sup>163</sup> With changes in climate and volatility in food prices, this situation is only expected to get worse. The question is: can the region combat mass hunger and prevent impoverishment the next time the waters rage, prices sky-rocket or the earth shakes?

Each household's ability to cope depends on its assets, entitlements and capabilities. Robert Chambers defines vulnerability as '*defencelessness, insecurity and exposure to risks, shocks and stress, and difficulty in coping with them.*'<sup>164</sup> Each calamity — be it natural or manmade — reverses decades of hard-won development, and as household food stocks deplete, the tide of hunger slowly but surely begins to rise.

## CLIMATE FRAGILITY

Geography, coupled with population density and high levels of poverty, make South Asia especially vulnerable to shocks caused by, or exacerbated by, climate change. By the end of the century, 125 million people across Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan could be rendered homeless by rising sea levels.<sup>165</sup>

## CLIMATE HAZARDS WILL INCREASE

Two-thirds of all disasters in South Asia are already related to weather fluctuations.<sup>166</sup> Climate change will add additional risks. It will make hazards more erratic and unpredictable and disasters more likely.

Bangladesh is the country most frequently battered. Sixty percent of the country is already flood-prone.<sup>167</sup> By 2050 floods or drought are expected to affect more than 60 million people each year in Bangladesh alone.<sup>168</sup> A one metre rise in sea level may also result in the flooding of 16 percent of the country's land area.<sup>169</sup>

Nepal is also highly vulnerable. It ranks fourth among 170 nations on a recent Climate Change Vulnerability Index in its susceptibility to impacts of climate change in the next 30 years.<sup>170</sup> With higher temperatures, the number of extreme weather events will increase.

Poor people, because of their direct dependence on natural resources, will be among the most vulnerable across South Asia.<sup>171</sup> Projected changes in the frequency and severity of extreme climate-related natural disasters may have the most serious consequences for food insecurity.<sup>172</sup>

## AGRICULTURAL YIELDS WILL BE HIT HARD

With three-fifths of the cultivated area in South Asia rain-fed, farmers very much depend on the regularity of the monsoons. But hailstorms threaten to destroy crops in the hilly areas; recurrent droughts increase the vulnerability of arid and semi-arid areas; and in future, the acceleration of melting of glaciers in the Himalayas could lead to greater flood risks and unparalleled water shortages. The Indus Basin is particularly vulnerable to seasonal changes in glacial melt water regimes<sup>173</sup>. Fertile delta systems and coastal areas will be threatened by inundation and saline intrusion into the lowland agricultural plains.

Even the most optimistic studies indicate that South Asian agriculture will be particularly hard hit (Figure 11). Seven out of nine food crops could deteriorate in yield with just 1–2°C of warming by 2030.<sup>174</sup> Crop models indicate that average yields in 2050 may decline by about 50 percent for wheat, 17 percent for rice, and about 6 percent for maize from their 2000 levels.<sup>175</sup>

These changes in temperature will affect the growing period of crops, which if reduced by even five percent could have a drastic impact on yields, given that crops are already at the edge of temperature stress.<sup>176</sup> For example, a rise in temperature of 1.5°C and a precipitation increase of 2 mm could result in a decline of rice yields of 3 to 15 percent.<sup>177</sup>

As a result, climate change is predicted to disproportionately affect impoverished rural households which depend on climate sensitive agriculture.<sup>178</sup> The Indo-Gangetic plain, home to one-seventh of mankind and which produces one-fifth of the world's wheat, is likely to be especially hard hit.<sup>179</sup> This alone could threaten the food security of 200 million people.<sup>180</sup> Bangladesh, perhaps more than any other country, faces threats to the production of rice on 80 percent of its cultivated land area.<sup>181</sup> Smallholder rain-fed farms, with the least capacity to adapt to climate change, are likely to be most affected. Climate change's most savage impact could be the increase of hunger.

As Mohammad Iliasuddin, a Bangladeshi farmer describes, *'I know I am supposed to sow by a certain date or time. That is what my forefathers have been doing. But then for several years the temperature and weather has not just seemed right for what we have been doing traditionally. It is exasperating, as I do not know how to cope.'*<sup>182</sup>

Farmers across South Asia realise that the seasons are already changing.<sup>183</sup> The duration of the cropping period has also shrunk perceptibly in Pakistan's

**Figure 11: Agro-ecological systems vulnerable to climate change in South Asia**

Agro-ecological system	Impact of climate change
Mountain eco-systems	Himalayan ecosystems vulnerable to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and flash floods
Low-lying coastal system	Sea level rise, saline water intrusion, storm surge, threat to mangroves and coral reefs
Semi-arid tropics	Reduced rainfall, drought, less groundwater recharge
Small islands	High exposure of agricultural infrastructure to sea level rise
Mega-deltas	Intense hydrological cycle and flooding during monsoon season

Source: Oxfam Novib

southern Punjab and Baluchistan provinces, with a forward shift in sowing time and an earlier harvest.<sup>184</sup> Farmers are struggling to adapt.

## DISASTERS WILL TRIGGER RISE IN FOOD PRICES

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, scarcity of food and water usually loom large. Ali Khan, a refugee from Baluchistan in the wake of the 2010 Pakistan flood, bemoans, 'We used to have a store with food for a year, but it's gone with the flood.'<sup>185</sup> To make matters worse, food prices in local markets also usually soar.<sup>186</sup>

Stock markets and international commodity markets are equally ruthless.<sup>187</sup> Wheat prices gained in Chicago and sugar rose in New York and London on speculation that the flood in the densely populated agricultural heartland of Pakistan might force the world's sixth most populous country to import its basic staples.<sup>188</sup> But fortunately, Pakistan had accumulated record high levels of buffer wheat stocks before the floods.<sup>189</sup> This may not be the case every time.

Seasonality of climate and food production calendars also strongly impacts poverty and food consumption. In mid-summer 2006 for example, there was an almost 100 percent increase in the market price for potato in Kabul compared with October (the harvest month).<sup>190</sup>

## INTERCONNECTEDNESS WILL CREATE REGIONAL RIPPLES

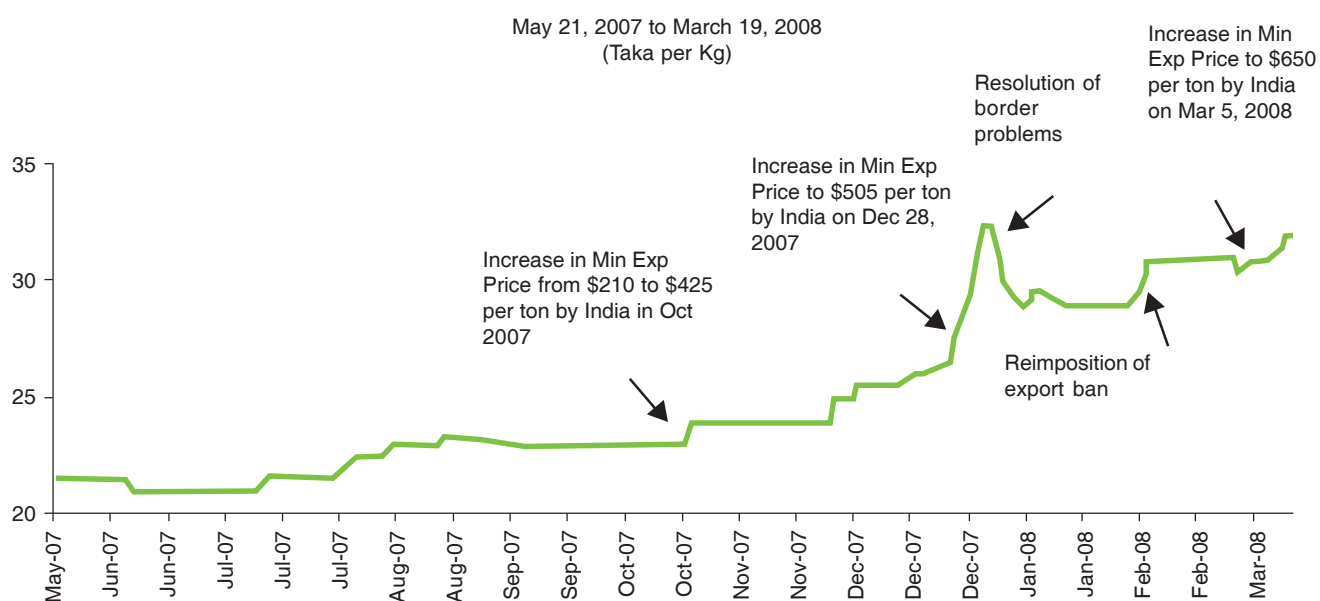
Natural disasters often have a pan-South Asian impact. The Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, simultaneously affected four South Asian countries. The 2007 monsoon floods displaced more than 16 million people across Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. The periodic cyclones in the Bay of Bengal batter coastal regions of both India and Bangladesh.

The frequency and intensity of climatic disasters is expected to increase and often transcend national boundaries.<sup>191</sup> The most severe impacts of climate change may have a huge regional spread. Bangladesh, for example, shares 54 rivers with India.<sup>192</sup> So a coordinated regional response is essential, especially in the Himalayan region.

## FOOD PRICE VOLATILITY

While food prices have varied across South Asian countries since 2008,<sup>193</sup> net food importing countries suffered the most.<sup>194</sup> Knee-jerk use of export bans and preference for biofuels threaten to further exacerbate food insecurity and vulnerability of poor households across the region.

**Figure 12: Price of coarse rice in Bangladesh affected by export bans by India**



Source: World Bank (2010), Food Price Increases in South Asia: National Responses and Regional Dimensions, South Asia Region, New Delhi: World Bank

## IMPORT DEPENDENCE IS INCREASING

The skewed rules of global agricultural trade serve to tilt the scales against developing countries.<sup>195</sup> To make matters worse, some countries in South Asia are increasingly becoming excessively dependent on imports, at a time when the international market is less able to ensure supply at affordable prices.

Though Bangladesh has kept its external dependence on staple foodgrains within 10 percent of its needs, in the last 15 years it has been both one of the leading recipients of food aid and one of the top ten importers of food grain.<sup>196</sup> Nepal, which was once self-sufficient in food production, now increasingly needs to import.

Pakistan is an exporter of wheat and rice, but its import of food items recorded a rise of 74 percent in the six months between July 2010 and January 2011, inflating its import bill to \$3.15bn.<sup>197</sup>

Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan also regularly feature on the FAO list of 'countries in food security crisis requiring external assistance'.<sup>198</sup> They are all low-income food deficit countries<sup>199</sup> which are now sensitive to fluctuations in international prices.

India is the only exception in South Asia as a net agricultural exporter, though it has recently increased its imports of edible oils.<sup>200</sup> But whenever India decides to enter international spot markets to make purchases of foodgrains, oilseeds or fertiliser, however small, then due to the sheer size of its economy, prices tend to zoom upwards.<sup>201</sup>

## EXPORTS BANS ARE DISTANCING NEIGHBOURS

Following the 2008 global food crisis, several South Asian economies have slipped into panic mode. Their initial knee jerk reaction was to ban exports. In 2008, India periodically increased the minimum export price of non-basmati rice or imposed a blanket ban on exports. Each time, the price of rice in Dhaka spiked (Figure

12).<sup>202</sup> Bangladesh was short changed. Panic buying gripped the country and to add fuel to the scarcity, the Bangladeshi government tripled its rice-import target.<sup>203</sup>

To this day, Afghanistan remains highly dependent on Pakistan for imports of its staple wheat. But Pakistan has imposed an export tax for all Afghan-bound commercial goods, including wheat.<sup>204</sup>

Other food importing countries in South Asia, like Sri Lanka, have realised that they can often ill afford to rely so heavily on international markets. Only 12 percent of all cereals enter world markets<sup>205</sup> and rice is particularly scarce, with only 7 percent traded. Sometimes, it has appeared that no reasonable amount of money could buy the South Asian staple in international markets.

## FOOD PRICES ARE INCREASINGLY LINKED TO ENERGY

The price of food is increasingly being linked to energy prices. As energy prices soar, the costs of agriculture increases. More expensive oil leads to higher costs for energy usage on farms, greater transportation costs and more expensive inputs such as fertilizer. Limited affordability puts further downward pressure on yields, which in turn pushes food prices upward.

## PRIORITY: TIME TO REBUILD

Across South Asia, 60 percent of farming is concentrated in rain-fed areas that depend solely on monsoons. With the imminent threats of climate change and food price volatility, the resilience of those communities needs to be strengthened. Across South Asia there is an urgent need to boost grain productivity and meet the challenges of climate change head on.<sup>206</sup>

Crop insurance schemes are needed to compensate farmers for losses from the vagaries of the weather.<sup>207</sup> More areas need to be brought under sustainable irrigation – irrigation suited to the needs of smallholder farmers. Allocations for agriculture research and development have to be increased substantially.

**3**

**THE AGE OF  
PROSPERITY:  
NUTRITION ON  
EVERY PLATE**





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*'Now we spend less money on food, have a large quantity of vegetables to eat and excess to sell... We are healthier.'*

Piyathi Nandasena,  
Organic 'home gardener,' Sri Lanka

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Sri Lankan children are on average healthier and better nourished than their South Asia siblings. And this is not an anomaly. It reflects an historical legacy of concerted government investment in healthcare and education and implementation of almost four decades of universal food subsidies. In the last twenty years too, despite protracted conflict, child underweight rates have declined by one-quarter and stunting<sup>208</sup> by three-quarters.<sup>209</sup>

Today, rapidly spreading organic home gardens are also helping mothers like Piyathi to sustainably grow their families out of poverty.

Food injustice cannot be cured with a silver bullet, but a comprehensive range of interventions - from India's

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA, 2005)<sup>210</sup> to Pakistan's land redistribution programme in Sindh province<sup>211</sup> and the revolutionary 'System of Rice Intensification' practice (Box 6) are slowly but surely strengthening the food security of vulnerable families — in both small and large measure.

Oxfam therefore believes that it is entirely possible for South Asia to achieve the dream of food justice. It is a matter of political will, commitment and focused action. The vision and roadmap are crystal clear. But effective implementation is crucial to translate this dream into reality.

With the recent establishment of democracy in Afghanistan and Nepal and the end of prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka, new vistas of opportunity have also been thrown open. The time is ripe to usher in an age of regional prosperity that will ensure nutritious food on every plate.

Oxfam recommends that South Asian policy makers focus their attention on four overarching priorities: a) guaranteeing the universal right to food, b) supporting smallholder agriculture, c) bolstering climate resilience and d) strengthening regional cooperation.

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## A. Guarantee the universal right to food

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*'Before, we had to sleep hungry, but now we can afford three meals a day.'*

Sunil Munda, 2010  
MGNREGA worker, India<sup>212</sup>

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Many of the ancient religions practised across the vast expanse of South Asia have strong spiritual traditions which emphasise feeding the hungry and supporting the impoverished as acts of righteousness.<sup>213</sup>

In the modern era, food justice must no longer be confined to acts of charity or benevolence. The right to food as the most basic of human rights is enshrined in many international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). *'Any hungry person is one whose right to food has been violated'*.<sup>214</sup> The Indian Supreme Court too, in a landmark judgement, has upheld that the right to food arises from the fundamental 'right to life'.

To protect this most basic of rights, it is the responsibility of governments as primary duty-bearers to undertake a multiple range of concrete initiatives. Of course, one of the necessary conditions (though far from sufficient) for legal entitlements to translate into a meaningful guarantee is the prevalence of a functional democracy. This enables political commitment from the 'top' to be combined with social pressure from 'below' as two forces which can simultaneously ensure that the letter and the spirit of the law are fulfilled.

More specifically, to protect the right to food, governments need to enact legislation and ensure the effective delivery of social entitlements so that no woman, man or child needs to go to bed hungry at night. But most importantly, governments need to focus their efforts on the most vulnerable — especially women and children. Marginalised communities too need special attention, especially those living in conflict-affected zones.

## ENACT LEGISLATIVE GUARANTEES

The most crucial step for governments to uphold the right to food is to ensure that it is included in national constitutions and enshrined in laws which cannot be withdrawn with changes in government. These are crucial tools to synergise policies, administrative responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms.

All South Asian countries are signatories to the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to food — signed by 187 countries in 2004. But India is the only country which has made any headway in this direction. The country is currently in the process of enacting a food security bill. But the current draft legislation is grossly diluted<sup>215</sup> and needs to be substantially strengthened to ensure its universal applicability.<sup>216</sup>

Other South Asian countries would also gain from treading this path to legislative guarantees. Afghanistan in particular needs an integrated food security policy which builds on the FAO 'twin-track approach'<sup>217</sup> to coordinate the disparate efforts of the varied ministries and multiple donors. A new long-term vision beyond agriculture is also necessary as over half of Afghan households are dependent on non-farm livelihoods.<sup>218</sup>

Employment guarantees could prove to be useful in both urban and rural contexts. They are an important means to create a social protection floor to ensure that food and/or cash transfers reach vulnerable families. They can also be geographically targeted to the poorest regions of a country. In the last five years, India's MGNREGA, for example, which now covers 53 million households (30 percent of rural households in 2009–10) has established itself.<sup>219</sup> While all of rural Bangladesh would benefit from a similar guarantee, the priority is to ensure that at least the Northern 'char' regions have a permanent mechanism to overcome seasonal food crises like *monga* (Box 5).

## IMPROVE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL ENTITLEMENTS

South Asia already has a rich array of social protection schemes with expansive coverage. Bangladesh's Public Food Distribution System (PFDS), for example, reaches approximately 19 percent of the population.<sup>220</sup> In India's chronically drought-prone Rajasthan, public distribution system (PDS) 'fair price shops' constitute 76 percent of all grocery retailers.<sup>221</sup>

The PDS not only delivers subsidised food but also plays an important role to universally stabilise market prices.<sup>222</sup> In Pakistan, for example, the government intervenes directly in the wheat market — the main staple — with a subsidy of 0.14 percent of GDP, one-third of which is paid to millers.<sup>223</sup>

But many of these food- and cash-based social protection programmes often fail to realise their full potential. In Pakistan, the poorest 40 percent of the population receive

### Box 5: Guaranteed employment needed to withstand Bangladesh's *monga*

In northern Bangladesh, the *monga* is common. It is the 'hunger season' when the chronic dearth of rural employment impoverishes millions. It creates a famine-like situation in the pre-harvest months between October and November. Families run low on their household stocks of foodgrain, and little work is available on farms.

Seventy-five-year-old Abdul Husain, lives on the 'char' islands on the Brahmaputra River. Life here is perennially harsh, battling one crisis after another. This year most of Abdul's time has been spent recovering from devastating floods, fixing broken homes and rebuilding food stocks. But the most predictable annual calamity is the *monga*.

Oxfam partner organisations regularly initiate cash-for-work schemes for landless labourers and marginal farmers, who often go for days without food because of severe unemployment. But given the predictability of the *monga*, Oxfam has advocated with the government to initiate long-term anti-hunger measures to increase employment opportunities around the year.

Source: Das Maitreyi (2010) 'Employment Programs By Any Other Name...', blogpost, End Poverty in South Asia; and Oxfam GB, 'Evaluation of the River Basin Programme in Bangladesh', Executive Summary, Oxfam GB, June 2008; NFPCSP (2009) 'Study on the first phase of the 100-Day Employment Generation Programme', Technical Report, BRAC Development Institute.

The Government of Bangladesh did adopt a 100-day Employment Generation Programme (EGP) in the wake of high food price inflation in 2007–2008. It displayed how effective cash-for-work can be in boosting incomes of extremely poor families to improve food consumption and invest in productive assets. Building on this experience, the government is now implementing the Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP), a cash-based workfare program.

But Bangladesh's EGPP is very different from India's NREGS. Its design seems more geared to fulfil World Bank conditionalities of 'pre-agreed results indicators, to ensure greater efficiency in program delivery,' rather than India's emphasis on accountability to workers and their entitlements. Besides, the EGPP is not a permanent guarantee enshrined in law.

The annual *monga* requires a more enduring and sustained long-term remedy.

only 46 percent of the benefits of Bait-ul-Mal and 43 percent of Zakat resources (Table 2).<sup>224</sup>

Incorrect targeting of beneficiaries, whether through India's Below Poverty Line (BPL) surveys or Pakistani Zakat's community-based identification methods, are the main culprits. Even the most sophisticated and participatory survey designs, when put to the test of ground realities, suffer from widespread selection errors i.e. inclusion of undeserving households and exclusion of the eligible.

Therefore, given the magnitude and depth of hunger in the region, which affects more than two-thirds of the population, universal programmes are more effective; they at least ensure that needy, vulnerable households are not excluded. They also ensure that the petty bureaucracy has no role to play as gate-keeper for eligibility — a process which invariably spawns local-level corruption.

India's MGNREGA, for example, has proved to be remarkably effective without any explicit targeting and half of the workers in 2009–10, for example, belonged to the most socially marginalised and impoverished communities.<sup>225</sup> The self-selection mechanism ensures

that only those who are really needy will be willing to undertake physical labour for eight hours a day. Food distribution systems can also similarly focus on nutritious millets and other foodgrains which are only favoured by poor households.

But across South Asia, social protection schemes are plagued by leakages.<sup>226</sup> Only 41 percent of the grains released by the Indian government reach poor households.<sup>227</sup> In work programmes, separation of the implementation agency from the payment agency is an important measure to prevent conflict of interests. Every effort needs to be made to weed out corruption, including building strong decentralised institutions for redressing grievances and implementing penalties.

### INDEX ALL SOCIAL TRANSFERS TO INFLATION

In the wake of prolonged food inflation, the crux of the problem is that the real value of social transfers is in danger of being depleted. Therefore, one of the key demands of workers movements across South Asia is to ensure that cash-based transfers — including minimum wages — are indexed to inflation.

Pakistan's New Labour Policy 2010 has raised the minimum wage for 50 million workers.<sup>228</sup> In India too, after a concerted civil society agitation, the government did link NREGA wages to the consumer price index for agricultural labourers, but resisted the demand to bring them on a par with minimum wages.<sup>229</sup> Bangladesh, too, after massive labour unrest in 2010, did double the minimum wages for garment workers,<sup>230</sup> though it remains one of the lowest wage rates in the world.<sup>231</sup>

It is also essential to ensure that this process is automatic and does not depend on the *noblesse oblige* of the government to initiate periodic hikes. In Bangladesh, for example, higher wages did eventually compensate for higher food prices in the fifties and sixties, but only after a lag of several years during which millions were pauperized.<sup>232</sup>

Food assistance programmes too need an automatic boost. In the midst of skyrocketing food prices, for instance, schools across India struggle to cook a nutritious midday meal for children because of their limited budgets.<sup>233</sup>

## FOCUS ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The social minimum floor should also focus special attention on the most vulnerable. Lactating women and children, for example, have special nutrition needs. Young children need to be fed several times a day. And

the first two years offer a critical window of opportunity. The Lancet Child Survival Series<sup>234</sup> identifies breastfeeding<sup>235</sup> as the single most effective malnutrition preventive intervention to save lives. Mothers also need the support of crèches and cash entitlements, which can enable them to recuperate after giving birth, and give adequate time to feed their vulnerable infants.

India's MGNREGA has also ushered in a gender revolution in rural India by ensuring that wages explicitly do not discriminate based on gender, both on official worksites and beyond.<sup>236</sup>

Meals in pre-schools and schools are also a 'low-hanging fruit' when it comes to supporting children's rights to food. They not only end classroom hunger but can also play a role to revive smallholder agriculture.<sup>237</sup> They have proven their efficacy as a universal incentive in India.<sup>238</sup> Pakistan's Tawana programme, on the other hand, focuses on girls and is geographically targeted to the poorest districts.<sup>239</sup>

Combating hunger will require a new governance of food crises both at the national and regional levels and this necessitates co-operation from countries and a merging of capacities. Better collaboration will in turn help South Asia fully integrate its economic growth and take a giant leap forward towards safeguarding its population's universal right to food.

**Table 2: The main social protection programmes across South Asia**

Scheme	Type	Description	Allocation	Coverage (approx)	Targeting
<b>India</b>					
Public Distribution System (PDS)	Subsidized food	Wheat and rice and sugar procured from farmers at guaranteed 'minimum support prices' (MSP) and delivered through 500,000 'fair price shops'	Rs 42,490 crore USD 9.5bn	160 million households	Targeted (changed from universal in 1998) based on BPL surveys
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)	Universal public works	Guarantees 100 days employment per rural household per year	Rs 30100 crore USD 6.7bn	54 million rural households	Universal
Integrated Child Development Scheme	Supplementary nutrition for pre-school children	Supplementary nutrition as part of pre-school education	Rs 6705 crore USD 1.5bn	35.5 million pre-school children	Universal
Midday meals	School meals	Freshly cooked meal for children in grades 1–8 in government schools	Rs 8000 crore USD 1.8bn	139 million school children	Universal
Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)	Non-contributory social pensions	Monthly cash benefits for BPL elderly	Rs 5109 crore USD 1.1bn	16 million elderly	Targeted: Below Poverty Line surveys
<b>Pakistan</b>					
Bait ul Mal Food Support Programme (PBM) <sup>240</sup>	Food and cash subsidies	Food subsidies and cash transfers	USD 28.9m (0.04 % of GDP)	1.46 million households	Targeted: Disabled persons, invalids, widows, orphans and households living below the poverty line
Benazir Income Support Programme	Cash grant	Cash grant to mitigate food price increases	USD 625m	1.8 million people	Targeted: BPL families and Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs)
Tawana Pakistan	School meals	Midday meals for girls	USD 8.11m	530,000 beneficiaries	Targeted: Girls in rural primary schools in the poorest provinces
Wheat Subsidy	Subsidised food	Subsidised wheat for consumers through utility stores and flour mills and MSP for farmers	0.14 % of GDP	Universal	Universal: Direct subsidy to control of wheat prices

Contd...

Scheme	Type	Description	Allocation	Coverage (approx)	Targeting
<b>Bangladesh</b>					
Vulnerable Group Development Programme	Food transfers	In-kind wheat transfer. Monthly food rations for two years.	USD 54m	3.75 million	Targeted: Extremely poor women 18-49 based on 4 criteria of chronic poverty
100 Day Employment Generation Programme	Employment schemes	100 days employment per year	USD 273m	2 million households	Targeted: Rural chronically poor working age people living in vulnerable disaster-prone areas
Old Age Allowance Scheme	Social assistance		USD 44m	1.32 million	Targeted: Community selection of poor elderly citizens, especially women, based on poverty criteria
<b>Nepal</b>					
Cash for Work	Employment schemes	Unskilled workfare	USD 0.57m	55,000 households in Kamali region	Targeted: Unemployed people in remote areas
Old Age allowance	Old age pension	Benefits are distributed quarterly	0.23 % of GDP	76 per cent of eligible older people <sup>241</sup>	Targeted: Beneficiary age is 70
<b>Sri Lanka</b>					
Samrudhi	Cash transfers and loans	Consumption grant transfers, loans	USD 0.37m	2.1 million households	Targeted: Poor, youth and vulnerable groups.

Source: Social Protection in South Asia: A Review, UNICEF, July 2009

Opposite: Sodhi Solangi, 42, lives with her husband, Ramzan solangi, and her 5 children in Ramzan village, Umerkot district of Sindh. After her previous land was destroyed in the floods, she was awarded 8 acres of land in first phase distribution and bought another 8 acres from the profit made from wheat and cotton grown on the initial land. With this new land, the Solangi family are getting their lives back to how it was prior to the floods. (Pakistan 2011) Caroline Gluck/Oxfam

B.

## Support smallholder agriculture

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*'Now we have our own land... It feels so good when we work there. When we used to work for others, we would have to drag ourselves there.'*

Sodhi Solangi, 2011  
Smallholder Farmer, Pakistan

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Hunger among food producers across the developing world is an ironic reality. South Asian population projections have raised the spectre of agriculture not being able to cope with the rising population in the coming decades. The peasantry is particularly under threat of being sidelined.

In this context, there is an urgent need to protect land and forest rights, end forcible land acquisitions, increase investment in smallholders, support agro-ecologically sustainable agriculture and ensure that smallholders are prioritised in the retail value chain.

### PROTECT LAND AND FOREST RIGHTS

Land rights issues are usually intensely political, highly complex, frequently contested and of long duration.<sup>242</sup> But, addressing the complex issue of land rights is an urgent priority across South Asia which has now emerged into the media and political limelight.<sup>243</sup>



### Box 6: Struggle for land rights in Pakistan

Naimat Ahmed's village in Thatta district of Sindh, is still under water after the devastating 2010 floods. Yet Naimat and a group of other women in her village were determined to head back home as quickly as possible to protect their lands. Until earlier this year, she had no land at all.

But the provincial government in Sindh has launched a path-breaking land re-distribution programme, the first scheme of its kind in South Asia. Naimat was awarded four acres as tracts of state-owned land are being given to landless women peasants to reduce poverty and usher in wider social changes in rural areas.

It is estimated that 60 percent of people in Sindh are landless. But politically influential and wealthy

*zamindar* landlords who form a tiny minority of only six percent of the farming population possess as much as 44 percent of all farmland.

In this landscape, Oxfam and its partner, Participatory Development Initiatives, have been helping Naimat and other women with legal support about their newfound rights to claim land under the re-distribution scheme. Effective lobbying with the Sindh government has also ensured that some of the original flaws in the land programme have been ironed out.

Oxfam's advocacy focus now is to ensure that this path-breaking land distribution programme spreads to other parts of Pakistan.

Source: Oxfam and its partner's websites

The Constitution of Pakistan, for example, gives equal land entitlement to women, but few have land titles. In this context, Oxfam partners in Sindh have successfully advocated with the provincial government to initiate a land distribution programme which prioritises women (Box 6). This is a historic step forward to empower landless women and usher in wider social changes in rural areas.

In the Hambantota district of southern Sri Lanka, the mobile service programme of the Land Commission has played an important role to enable even *chenna* (slash and burn) farmers in Yala National Park to obtain individual land deeds for farmers and also collective permits to start a dairy village and establish several collective farms.<sup>245</sup>

Nepal offers some of the most important lessons in community forestry. The landmark Forestry Act 1993 allowed forest-dependent communities to directly participate in, and take control of, forest management at the local level. Today, one-third of Nepal's population participates in community forestry, which has proven to be an important means of social protection, especially for the poorest households without access to land for agricultural cultivation.<sup>246</sup>

### END FORCED 'LAND GRABS' AND FORCED 'ACQUISITIONS'

Apart from re-distribution, it is equally important to protect the land rights of existing farmers. India's archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894, for example, which forces farmers to hand over their land for undefined 'public interest' without consensus, consultation or the right to negotiate, needs to be repealed.<sup>247</sup> Instead, new legislation must be enacted which adopts

a participative model and ensures that displaced farmers receive comprehensive resettlement and rehabilitation packages.<sup>248</sup>

It is equally important that private companies of South Asian origin do not violate the land rights of farmers on foreign shores and refrain from unethical 'land grabs' abroad.

### INCREASE AGRO-ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT IN SMALLHOLDERS

For decades, smallholder agriculture has been deeply neglected across South Asia. Though in 2008 the Indian government, for example, in response to the spate of suicides, cancelled the entire debt of \$15bn of 40 million smallholder farmers, this has remained a one-off initiative.<sup>249</sup>

On the other hand, Bangladesh's agricultural extension policy (1995–2010), which adopts a long-term approach to support smallholders, is credited with boosting food production and reducing rural poverty.<sup>250</sup>

Oxfam's partner in Nepal, Pavitra Janakalyan Co-operative, endorses the need to merge credit with the availability of appropriate technical advice for smallholder farmers.

51-year old farmer, Mohan Bahadur Gharti, is categorical: '*Loans provided by the cooperative at lower interest rate greatly encouraged and opened many doors for me. I also really appreciate their guidance through regular visits and the compost manure training organised in my own village. I am now confident of clearing my previous loans.*'<sup>251</sup>



### Box 7: The rice revolution is growing

Rice is the major source of calories for half the world's population. It is also the single largest source of employment and income for rural peoples. But after the dramatic increases achieved with Green Revolution technologies during the seventies and eighties, there has been a slowdown in the yield gains in many countries.

Many farming families across Asia struggle to grow enough rice to feed their families, let alone repay debts for things like seed and fertilizers. But rice production will need to increase dramatically in the next decades with less land per capita, smaller and less reliable water supplies, less degradation of the environment, and less drain on the resources of smallholder farmers.

An innovative rice-growing technique, the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), could be the long-awaited cure. SRI is a set of alternative crop management practices, developed in the eighties in Madagascar and suited to smallholder farmers.

SRI uses organic compost, natural pesticides and hand-weeding instead of expensive chemicals and does not genetically modify the rice. Instead, by carefully managing planting, soil, water and nutrients, SRI uses half the water and much less seed than traditional rice-growing methods, promotes improved soil quality and stronger root and canopy growth, and produces less methane emissions and much higher yields.

The benefits of SRI have already spread across 40 countries. SRI concepts and practices continue to evolve as they adapt to varied conditions. It has been able to increase productivity of both improved and local rice varieties.

Source: Africare, Oxfam America, WWF-ICRISAT Project (2010). More Rice for People, More Water for the Planet. WWF-ICRISAT Project, Hyderabad, India, Maureen Bathgate <http://www.oxfam.org.au/explore/health/food-and-nutrition/the-rice-revolution>

SRI has been largely a civil society innovation, embraced by hundreds of local, national and international NGOs. The governments of Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam – where over two-thirds of the world's rice is produced – have also explicitly endorsed SRI methods in their national food security programmes.

In India SRI was introduced in 2000 with a variety of experiments in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. WWF-ICRISAT has systematically evaluated SRI methods, through on-farm field trials over several years. SRI has also been incorporated into India's National Food Security Mission (NFSM) as a strategy for raising rice production in over 130 food-insecure districts across India.

In Sri Lanka, Oxfam Australia has been supporting about 1,000 marginalised farmers, mostly women-headed households, with SRI training, seed, tools, weeders, technical support and loans. In a village in Polonnaruwa, women have even pioneered a technique to make their own compost using black sand, cow, chicken and goat manure, ash, leaves and straw.

*'When we started out, the men said 'women can't harvest, you won't get a good yield', a smallholder farmer Thayananthi says. 'When we used natural pesticides and fertilisers, the men laughed at us.'*

But all that has now changed. After their first successful crop, the men started to ask the women about SRI and their natural pesticides and fertilisers. Since the introduction of SRI in Sri Lanka, average production costs among participating farmers have dropped by half, while average yields have increased from 70 to 120 bushels per acre.

SRI could well be the game-changer for Asian food security.

The International Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report of 2008 provides a robust blueprint on how to prioritise smallholder agriculture, especially for women farmers. It also strongly recommends support to agro-ecological, climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture techniques.<sup>252</sup> This is essential not only to meet the region's food security challenges, but also replenish precious public goods such as clean water, groundwater recharge and soil conservation that are teetering on the brink, and for carbon sequestration and flood protection.<sup>253</sup>

The spread of locally apt farming systems – from the home gardens of Wayanad in Kerala to the salt-tolerant rice of the Sundarbans in deltaic Bangladesh – are prime examples<sup>254</sup> of community-based biodiversity management systems and practices.<sup>255</sup> The System for

Rice Intensification which is spreading across South Asia (Box 7) also offers great hope to improve water savings and boost yields.<sup>256</sup>

The inclusion of nutritious millets in India's proposed National Food Security Bill<sup>257</sup> would go a long way to fight hunger even during droughts.<sup>258</sup>

## ENSURE SMALLHOLDERS ARE PRIORITISED IN THE FOOD RETAIL CHAINS

The food crisis also drew attention to the difference between retail and farm-gate prices. Oxfam therefore encourages governments to support producer organisations and the private sector to ensure that poor farmers obtain a fairer deal in retail markets.

In Sri Lanka the private company Plenty Foods has developed a unique model to integrate smallholder farmers into its core supply chain (Box 8). State initiatives are equally important. The Indian state of Uttar Pradesh proposes to reduce the distance that farmers must travel to sell their produce to *mandis* (agricultural market yards) to ensure that farmers are not exploited by middlemen.<sup>259</sup>

The food supply chain also needs to eliminate wastage. Each day in India alone around Rs. 130 crores (US\$ 27m) of fruits and vegetables spoil before they reach

markets.<sup>260</sup> Large quantities of foodgrains in government warehouses are also routinely damaged for want of suitable storage facilities.<sup>261</sup> Investment in efficient transportation and storage needs to be substantially increased. Every grain counts.

Traditional local food processing and storage innovations like *qrut* (a form of dehydrated yoghurt) and *talkhan* (highly nutritious dry biscuit made with flour, almonds, and dried mulberries) developed during the long conflict years by the mountainous communities in Afghanistan, also offer important insights on the need to prioritise localized solutions.<sup>262</sup>

### Box 8: 'Plenty Foods' for smallholder farmers in Sri Lanka

Plenty Foods (Pvt) Ltd. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ceylon Biscuits Ltd. It is an integrated retail chain that trades, processes, and markets a range of fast-moving foods with an annual turnover of approximately US\$1.8m, with 85 percent of its revenue coming from domestic sales.

It operates through a network of 106 company-appointed distributors and retail market outlets across Sri Lanka. Plenty Foods operates a network of around 9,000 smallholders, to whom it provides agricultural extension services, financial credit and market access. The company provides farmers a minimum guaranteed price, committing to pay the market value or the contract price, whichever is higher, at the time of harvest.

In partnership with the government, other companies, Oxfam GB, as well as farmer organisations, Plenty Foods is working assiduously to build a high quality and reliable supply base for small farmers.

Plenty Foods has contractual relationships with 9,000 farmers across Sri Lanka, with the company also providing inputs, training, and extension services to farmers. Its main product lines have been developed to serve nutritional needs that are particularly relevant to rural and poor communities.

Plenty Foods' business model has seen it achieve a year-on-year growth rate of 30 percent over the past four years. In addition, it also works extensively with research institutions to improve production methods and yields. Over the past nine years, its collaboration with soya farmers has led to a 50 percent increase in production. The Company's R&D unit also works in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture to share technical know-how.

The brand 'Plenty Foods' has now come to be associated in Sri Lanka with responsible business and high quality nutritious products.

Source: Oxfam GB, 2010, Securing a Sustainable Supply Base: How Plenty Foods grew by 30% year on year and improved the earnings and livelihoods of the rural poor in Sri Lanka, Case Study.

## C. Protect against climate change

Climate change is no longer a distant threat for South Asia. It has already begun to have severe impacts on agriculture across the region. It is rapidly pushing the world's poorest people – those least responsible for it and with least resources to tackle it – to the limits of subsistence.

The fight against hunger and climate change therefore need to be complementary and synergised. In countries with scarce resources, then as the old saying goes, both birds need to be hit with the same stone.

### SUPPORT INCLUSIVE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

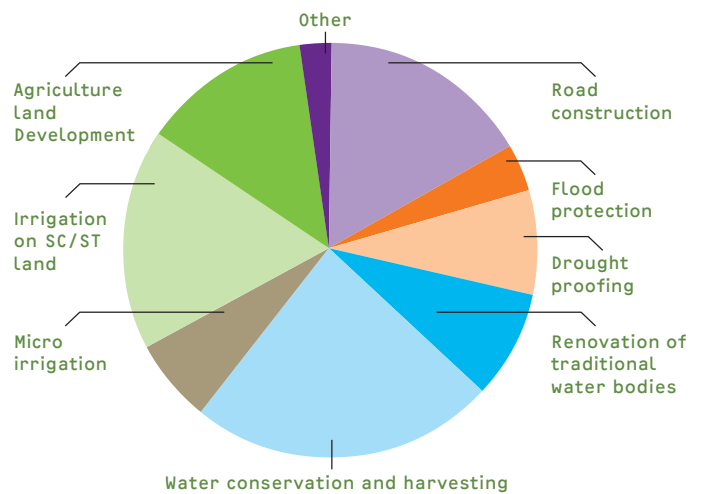
For South Asia, the climate clock is ticking. Without comprehensive national policies, initiatives and leadership, no effort to fight hunger or climate change – however ambitious – will succeed.

The least-developed countries (LDCs) in South Asia have taken the first steps. Bangladesh in 2005 and Nepal in 2010 have developed National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs). But though Pakistan as a middle-income country has initiated positive steps to implement a mandatory Crop Loan Insurance Scheme (CLIS) to protect small farmers, who are often the most exposed to natural hazards,<sup>263</sup> the government still has to prepare an integrated national action plan for climate change.

Integration is crucial as climate change cannot be dealt with in isolation. It needs to incorporate existing issues around sustainable livelihoods, disasters, water, and natural resources to frame adaptation in ways that communities can understand as 'climate-smart'. Participatory processes are essential for communities to identify their priorities.

India's ambitious employment guarantee programme MGNREGA has reaped unexpected dividends on this front. Since it is the *panchayats*<sup>264</sup> who decide and plan, seventy percent of the 'public works' chosen have prioritised environmental protection.<sup>265</sup> In just the last three years, as many as 1.9 million 'works' have focused on water conservation and drought-proofing alone (Figure 13). The central government now even plans to quantify the unanticipated benefits on agricultural productivity<sup>266</sup> and climate change adaptation.<sup>267</sup>

**Figure 13: Distribution of funds according to types of NREGS works, 2009-10**



Source: nrega.nic.in/DMU report/2009-10

The local adaptation programme of action (LAPA's) pilot in Nepal's Rupa Lake which focused on watershed management has also demonstrated that it is not enough simply to work with local communities; local and district governments are also an essential component, both in terms of financial and technical support.<sup>268</sup>

### Box 9: Will the Himalayas Smile Again?

Poor crop yields, water shortages and extreme temperatures are pushing rural villagers closer to the brink as climate change grips Nepal. Nepal is seeing an increase in temperature extremes, more intense rainfall and increased unpredictability in weather patterns, including drier winters and delays in the summer monsoons. Scientists warn that as the Himalayan glaciers shrink, and some even disappear, the impact will be felt even wider, by more than one billion people across Asia.

Climate changes already happening are heightening existing vulnerabilities, inequalities and exposure to hazards. Nepal is already one of the world's poorest nations, with 31 percent of its 28 million population living below the poverty line. Most of Nepal's poor live in rural areas that are most at risk to disasters such as floods and landslides.

Farmers report that changing weather patterns have dramatically affected their crop production, leaving them unable to properly feed themselves. Even in the best of times, with their small rain-fed plots of land they are barely able to produce enough food for their family.

Oxfam's 2009 report *'Even the Himalayas have stopped smiling: climate change, poverty and adaptation in Nepal'* recommends concrete action to help the Nepalese adapt to and mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

Yema Gharti, 39, a farmer is clear about the most effective solutions for her village. *'When we have irrigation I will have enough to feed my family for the whole year and I will even have enough to save some seeds and plant them the next year.'* Since access to water is so crucial for long-term food security, Oxfam with its partner IDES (Integrated Development Society) has initiated a cash-for-work employment programme which will enable the community to build micro irrigation systems, to grow their crops by relying less on the rain.

In a recent 2011 report *'Minding the Money: Governance of Climate Change Adaptation Finance in Nepal'*, Oxfam urges the government and international donors to follow up on Nepal's National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) to implement long-term programmes to benefit marginalised and vulnerable communities like Yema's – who need it the most in their daily struggle for survival.

Sources: OI (2009), *'Even the Himalayas have stopped smiling: climate change, poverty and adaptation in Nepal'*; OI (2009), *Millions of rural poor in Nepal could face more hunger as a result of climate change; situation "deeply worrying"*; Oxfam International, 28 August and Wiseman and Chhetri (2011), *Minding the Money: Governance of Climate Change Adaptation Finance in Nepal*, Khatmandu; Oxfam GB Nepal (Resource ID: 56472)

## ADVOCATE FOR MITIGATION OF THE CLIMATE DEBT

Nepal is absolutely typical of many countries in being extremely vulnerable to climate change (Box 9); yet it has one of the lowest greenhouse gas emissions in the world – just 0.025 percent of global total.<sup>269</sup>

Oxfam believes that this is a question of international climate justice. The largest carbon emitters should be bound by international law to protect the lives and livelihoods of those most at risk from the impacts of climate change.

As evidence grows linking specific floods, droughts or other extreme weather events to human-induced climate change, so the pressure for legal action will grow too on behalf of people whose human rights are effectively being violated by the emitters of excessive greenhouse gases<sup>270, 271</sup>. In solidarity, Oxfam organised a mock climate tribunal in Dhaka in November 2010 with more than 1,200 lawyers, politicians and economists, which listened to the testimonies of affected villagers.<sup>272</sup> Bangladesh is currently seeking more than \$10bn in compensation from polluting nations to finance adaptation.

Under the UNFCCC climate change convention, developing countries such as India do not have binding greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation commitments, which is in recognition of their small contribution to the greenhouse effect as well as low financial and technical

capacities. But India has set a voluntary target to cut the amount of carbon dioxide released per unit of gross domestic product by as much as 25 percent from 2005 levels by 2020. India also initiated in 2010 a new carbon tax (levy) on coal producers which is expected to raise \$ 535m to fund renewable energy.<sup>273</sup>

Other South Asian countries too could also voluntarily adopt innovative strategies to put a price on pollution. After all, we are on the frontlines of a changing climate.

## DISMANTLE TARGETS AND SUBSIDIES FOR BIOFUEL PRODUCTION

Inappropriate or excessive targets and subsidies for biofuel production are leading to land grabbing and distortions in the market for food products. International biofuel industries — fed on large government subsidies — are considered one of the key drivers of the 2008 price hike.<sup>274</sup> They also threaten to divert precious arable land away from the production of food crops — although farmers may be more sensible: eighty-five percent of Indian *jatropha* farmers have in fact stopped its cultivation.<sup>275</sup>

The Indian government policy to source 20 percent of all its petrol and diesel from biofuels by 2017 therefore needs to be urgently repealed.<sup>276</sup> Dismantling support measures for domestic biofuel industries such as blending and consumption mandates, subsidies, tax breaks, and import tariffs would be good not only for taxpayers but for the larger concerns of food security.



D.

# Extend regional co-operation

Regional co-operation is long overdue. South Asian governments and civil society need to improve the governance of food justice in earnest. Warm words alone won't fill empty bellies. Poor people can't eat promises.

Leaders need to display their commitment with concrete actions. The crucial priorities are to operationalise the long-pending regional food bank and learn lessons from the dark days of the isolating export bans to forge a consensus for co-operation.

Opposite: Women from Dola village including Yema Gharti, age 39, (with axe), and Bhabi Hamjajali (far left) construct a pond to irrigate their vegetable gardens in a project funded by Oxfam. Nepal's hill districts like Dadeldhura have always lacked the proper investment in irrigation and seeds to produce their own food. (Nepal 2010) Tom Pietrasik

## OPERATIONALISE THE SOUTH ASIAN FOOD BANK

One of the reasons that food prices hit such highs in 2008 is that panic buying by governments on international markets, as import-dependent countries sought to build up national stocks, can all too easily worsen the very volatility that it is trying to defend against.

Instead of acting unilaterally, there is much merit in governments working collectively to establish regional food reserves and strategic cross-border trading systems – an approach that creates resilience against volatility while reducing the risk of governments competing against each other.

The establishment of a South Asian food bank could greatly enhance food security as, after all, risk shared is risk reduced. The bank could serve as a buffer in years of foodgrain supply shortfall. It could also potentially prevent the type of food crisis that Bangladesh faced in 2008 because of her over-dependence on the world markets at a time when the availability of rice globally was limited.<sup>277</sup> It could also serve to prevent undue speculation in food markets by private traders against inflationary expectations.

But the administration of a SAARC Food Bank (SFB) inherently requires regional co-operation and collaborative action. Despite repeated promises since 1988, the SFB exists only on paper at this time. The peoples of South Asia cannot eat warm words. Before the next food crisis hits, South Asian leaders and governments must urgently transform it into a reality (Box 10).

## END REGRESSIVE 'EXPORT BANS'

At the height of the food price crisis, in a vacuum of trust, South Asian governments imposed export bans, one after another, which pushed up prices for food-importing countries. This zero-sum game of beggar-thy-neighbour policies is self-destructive and needs to end.

### Box 10: Where are the South Asian food security reserves?

Even 25 years after its establishment the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is yet to implement an initiative to address food security challenges across the region.

Shortly after the first SAARC summit in Dhaka in 1985, one of the earliest joint regional efforts proposed was the creation of a regional food reserve with the signing of the Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve (SAFSR) in 1988.

SAARC members were to contribute wheat or rice by earmarking their fair shares and provide adequate storage. A conservative estimate suggests that the region produces 1.4 times the total amount of food it needs in basic staples alone, indicating a grain surplus of approximately 40 percent. The explicit purpose of the reserve was that member countries would be entitled to withdraw the needed grains in the event of natural or man-made emergencies as means for eradicating food deficits.

The reserve was not expected to be a notional exercise. But, though *de jure* the surplus exists, *de facto* the SAFSR did not materialise on the ground. Leakages, hoarding, waste, complicated processes, harsh conditions and the balance of payments crisis in the region all played a role.

In 2007, SAARC re-inaugurated the initiative under a new name, with policy revisions in light of previous failures. But the new SAARC Food Bank (SFB) is strictly a case of old wine in a new bottle.

Despite a series of natural disasters and food price crises, the SFB has failed to deliver. Today, it exists only on paper but no serious attempts have been made toward its institutionalisation and implementation.

To transform this vision into a reality, some of the key recommendations are i) to invest in building new storage facilities, ii) decentralise and improve existing storage facilities, iii) streamline border protocols, iv) bolster national level distribution mechanisms especially in disaster-prone areas, v) reduce time lags between requests and actual delivery of foodgrains, vi) create an independent monitoring body with greater public transparency and proactive disclosure of information and vii) create a dispute resolution mechanism.

SAARC countries have already come together to create a regional Disaster Management Centre (DMC) to undertake tangible initiatives for disaster risk-reduction and response. Now the time is ripe for greater regional cooperation to lay the foundations for a fully operational SAR food bank.

Sources: Robinson, M (2011), Regional Grain Banking for Food Security: Past and Present Realities from SAARC Initiatives, CUTS International, Jaipur: India (with support from Oxfam Novib).(2008) 'South Asia: Regional food bank gets go-ahead', IRIN, 7 August, Mondal, Abdul (2010) 'Making SAARC Food Bank Operational', South Asian Outlook, November

Current global rules on food export restrictions are at best modest. While, *prima facie*, they are banned under the GATT and the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, which all South Asian governments have signed up to, in practice exemption clauses are vaguely worded and untested and allow countries to impose restrictions whenever they like.

Revising international trade rules will take time, but urgent action is needed. Therefore both India and Pakistan, as G20 members ought to take the lead and publicly commit to refrain from imposing sudden export restrictions. They ought to support this as a top priority in the agenda for the 2011 G20 in France.

4

**CONCLUSION:  
FOOD JUSTICE IN  
SOUTH ASIA**





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*If you deny food to even one man, the universe will be destroyed*

Subramanya Bharathiyar

Poet<sup>278</sup>

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The time has come. The depth of hunger in our region has been shockingly exposed. With more than a quarter of the world's hungry in South Asia, governments must seize the initiative and take advantage of this momentum.

The battle for food justice must be fought at every level, from village squares to the corridors of power of national capitals across South Asia. Civil society needs to keep up the pressure. Governments must not fail to respect, protect and fulfil the universal right to adequate and good quality food. Donors too should play their role by providing long-term reliable funding through jointly designed management mechanisms.

Any death due to starvation is one too many. Every child who dies of malnutrition is a blot on the moral conscience of our civilisation. More than 300 million people, who go to bed hungry tonight in South Asia, need to be fed. And in 2050 when the region's population increases to 2.3 billion and the agricultural system becomes increasingly precarious under the impacts of climate change, there can be no turning back.

To achieve the dream of sustainably ending hunger, Oxfam therefore urges governments and donors in South Asia to plant the seeds of change – now.

**1. Protect the universal right to food:** Reduce vulnerability by creating a minimum social protection floor to prevent people from falling into hunger.

- Enact justiciable legal rights to food and employment guarantees;
- Effectively implement an integrated array of adequately financed and inflation-indexed universal entitlements to protect food security;

- Create a dedicated administrative cadre to implement food schemes and redress grievances;
- Ensure that government programmes prioritise the needs of children and women, especially from marginalised communities and in conflict prone areas.

**2. Support smallholder farmers:** Build a new agricultural future by prioritising the needs of smallholder food producers — where the major gains in productivity, sustainability, poverty eradication and resilience can be achieved.

- Prioritise land reform and re-distribution of land, and support poor people's rights to land and other assets essential for productive livelihoods, especially for women;
- Increase agriculture investments that benefit smallholder farmers, especially women;
- Support agro-ecological, climate-resilient and sustainable agricultural techniques including sustainable irrigation;
- End forced 'land grabs' and forced 'acquisitions' both within and outside South Asia.

**3. Adapt to and mitigate climate change:** Work towards a new ecological future, by mobilising investments and shifting behaviours to achieve equitable distribution of scarce resources.

- Invest in inclusive climate change adaptation measures;
- Mitigate climate change by pursuing sustainable pathways to cutting carbon emissions;
- Dismantle subsidies and targets for biofuel production.

**4. Extend regional co-operation:** Forge a new era of regional co-operation in agriculture and food security.

- Operationalise the South Asian Food Bank as a multilateral grain reserve;
- End regressive 'export bans' especially among regional neighbours.

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# Images

- Cover Minas Das, beneficiary of Disaster Preparedness in northern districts of West Bengal, India, prepares food. 'Since the flood I've learned a lot. Now I try to save some food ready for the flood month so that I can feed my family. I don't want to be short of food again. (India, 2002) Shailan Parker/Oxfam
- P6 Oxfam beneficiaries from the Dadeldhura district of Western Nepal who have been involved in the livelihoods programme in the area hold some of the products they have produced. (Nepal 2011) Jisu Mok/ Oxfam
- P9 Buddhaji Pingla (28yrs, husband) and Suman Buddhaji Pingla (24yrs, wife) with their two sons Harshad Buddhaji Pingla (6) and Mukesh Buddhaji Pingla (3). Oxfam partner SAKAV, assisted this family in getting access to this land for agricultural use. They are in a field growing eggplant. (India 2010) Chris Johnson/ OxfamAus
- P12 Munir Ahmad showing some of the wheat seed that has been destroyed. Despite saving wheat seed for planting in November the seed has been destroyed by insects, which have increased due to the wet conditions. (Pakistan 2010) Jane Beesley/Oxfam
- P18 Sudha, house wife and member ADRA SHG, having lunch at her hopuse in Kandakaddu village at Cuddalore district. According to her the change in life styles have enabled people like her to have a better meal every day, the change is due to the availability of fresh water (bore well) which results in three cropping seasons in year as against one in year earlier. (India 2008) Atul Loke / Panos for Oxfam America
- P22 Somawathi Gunapala, from Pilanduwa village in central Sri Lanka picks ripe snake beans from the vegetable garden she established with four other community members. (Sri Lanka 2008) Maureen Bathgate/OxfamAUS
- P30 Freshly picked, organic peas growing using locally made compost – totally delicious! (India 2007) Rajendra Shaw/Oxfam
- P37 Sodhi Solangi, 42, lives with her husband, Ramzan solangi, and her 5 children in Ramzan village, Umerkot district of Sindh. After her previous land was destroyed in the floods, she was awarded 8 acres of land in first phase distribution and bought another 8 acres from the profit made from wheat and cotton grown on the initial land. With this new land, the Solangi family are getting their lives back to how it was prior to the floods.(Pakistan 2011) Caroline Gluck/Oxfam
- P42 Women from Dola village including Yema Gharti, age 39, (with axe), and Bhabi Hamjajali (far left) construct a pond to irrigate their vegetable gardens in a project funded by Oxfam. Nepal's hill districts like Dadeldhura have always lacked the proper investment in irrigation and seeds to produce their own food. (Nepal 2010) Tom Pietrasik
- P46 Guava seller.Prithvipur vegetable market. (India 2007) Rajendra Shaw/Oxfam
- Back Cover Spices on sale at the twice-weekly vegetable market in the town of Bara Gaon. The price of staple foods such as rice and vegetables have risen throughout India in recent months. (India 2011) Tom Pietrasik



**Forty percent of the world's hungry people today live in South Asia. The region's agriculture is also on the brink with productivity from the resource-intensive Green Revolution having reached a plateau after more than four decades. The pounding impact of climate change further weakens the fragility of South Asian food and agrarian systems.**

This report 'Nourish South Asia' describes a new age of crisis with widespread 'hunger amidst plenty' and the relentless onslaught of a three simultaneous challenges - equity, production, and resilience. But all is not bleak. Based on the extensive experience and research of Oxfam staff and partners around the region, this report also presents concrete reasons for optimism to turn the table around: to recreate an age of prosperity with nutrition on every plate and to achieve the dream of sustainable food justice.

'Nourish South Asia' also calls on South Asian leaders to rise to this challenge with vision and urgent, concrete initiatives - to protect the universal right to food, support smallholder farmers, adapt to and mitigate climate change and extend regional cooperation.

Nourish South Asia supports GROW, Oxfam's new campaign for better ways to grow, share and live together. A campaign about addressing the broken food system for the billions of us who eat food, and over a billion of men and women who grow it. Find out how you can share solutions for food, livelihood and the planet. Join the movement. Let's grow a better way.

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