

**Report on the South Asian Regional Seminar on
Preparing Inputs to FAO Special Session of the
Food Security
29-30 June, 2006
Kathmandu, Nepal**

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All Nepal Peasants' Association (ANPA) in co-ordination with South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) organised a South Asian Regional Seminar on **"Preparing Inputs to FAO Special Session of the Food Security"** which is going to be held in forth coming last week of October this year. In this context, seminar was organized from 29 to 30 June 2006, in Kathmandu, Nepal. The program was organized in such a way that the peasants/farmers in Nepal were celebrating their national rice plant day in the field. The international delegates for the program also took part this event.

Objectives of the Seminar

Obviously the objectives of the seminar concentrated on the main areas of interventions in the forth coming FAO special session on food security. The major points of discussions included:

- To prepare inputs to the Special session of the Committee of the food security to be held in Rome, Italy.
- To gather support and inputs from the broad range of sectors to push for the People's Convention on Food Sovereignty
- To raise awareness amongst the peasants, women, indigenous people, consumers, policy makers, media, workers, fisher-folks on the important issues of Food Sovereignty.
- To educate and mobilize people towards advocacy and policy changing efforts at various levels on issues of WTO, GE and Pesticides and Agrochemical TNCs.
- To consolidate and expand Peasant Movements in South Asian Regional level
- To establish network and linkages amongst the international peasant and civil society organizations
- To build a strong broad network of advocates for People's Food Sovereignty

Inaugural function

The program was organised in two-day schedule. The inaugural ceremony marked the eve of the first day programme which was presided over by Mr. Bamdev Goutam, the Chairperson of ANPA, Asian Peasants Coalition and well-attended by foreign delegates, three from India, one from each of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in the packed hall of reputed Hotel Marshangdi, Thamel, Kathmandu.

The ceremony was addressed by guest speakers from different countries. Mr. Biplab Halim, Chairperson of IMSE, India and vice- chairperson of APC said that the neo-liberal WTO regime has aggravated the food and hunger problem in South Asia and the world. He opined that FAO in its coming Special Session on Food Security should discard the anti people food policy and make ground for genuine agrarian reforms. He emphasised on that genuine

agrarian reform is the precondition for ensuring individual food security and in this context, it is necessary to analyse the reality and tasks before the Indian peasantry.

Mr. P. Chanaiya from APVVU, India called for serious homework and hoped the seminar producing outcomes for reforms in neo-liberal policy regimes. He further said that in the name of 'globalisation' multinational companies are gobbling up larger part of private industry, public sector industries finance banking insurance and also the agriculture and natural resources of these countries. In all the third world countries this process is being facilitated by the respective governments in those countries by introducing massive reforms in politics, existing regulations, rules and laws of the land which were not gifted from the top but achieved by the common people through series of struggles with great sacrifice.

Dr. Ram Anjaneyulu of CSA, India spoke out the need of small farmers and peasants of the region come together so that they can intervene in policy formulations. He added that the globalisation in agriculture is in fact nothing but corporatisation of the same in all over the third world today. Financial investment in the agriculture sector by agribusiness and corporation has created new form of dispossession for small and marginal farmers and land-less agricultural labourers dismantling the food security system.

Mr. Assim from Pakistan stressed on poverty of the region because of the neglect of land and land management in this region while Mr. Rejaul Karim from Bangladesh raised the issue of plight of poor farmers in his country and the rising growth rate thereof.

Mr. Sarath Fernando of Sri Lanka elaborated how he has been raising the farmers' issues for last two decades in many forums and seminars. He called on strong action against WB, IMF, WTO and even FAO whose interventions in policies are largely responsible for poverty and hunger in this region.

In his inaugural speech, Mr. Bamdev Gautam said that the struggle for peasants' rights marks the beginning of struggle for democracy in Nepal. Peasants' in Nepal had long been opposing the feudal land system and asserting their rights to land and other means of agriculture. These issues are well included in refined form in the movement of peasants' Food Sovereignty and it is but natural that we welcome the movement and the issues of Food Sovereignty. We propose review of food security policies designed under neo-liberal regime and WTO prospects. He strongly raised Food Sovereignty issues before FAO's forth coming Special session of the committee on Food Security going to be held in Rome and pleaded to include them in that Rome Declaration.

The programme was highlighted by many other speakers including Dr. Arjun Karki, SAAPE coordinator. While addressing the programme Dr. Karki said that South Asia has been raising the food issues as the largest number of world's hungry people stay in this region. Though there is largest fertile lands in this region the farmers are poorest and the neo-liberal policies and has aggravated the hunger and poverty.

Mrs. Bidhya Bhandari, MP and SAAPE, focal point highlighted the poor condition of women farmers in this region and especially of Nepal and demanded to restore equal women peasant right to translate Food sovereignty issues to grass root level.

S. N. Jodha from ICIMOD, speaking on the occasion, opined that small and poor farmers are more hard-hit in natural hazards and are more vulnerable. But neo-liberal policies favor modern commercial farm estates and profit breeding through them. This is totally against poverty alleviation ideas of WTO. A review in current policy regime is a must which is also the objective of this seminar.

Dr. Bimal Baniya the principal agri-scientist of NARC shared his experience on research on agriculture. He emphasised on the need of pro-peasants research in agriculture sectors. Representing government of Nepal Mr. Baburam Acharya, the Joint secretary; MOAF extended commitment to work together with peasants organizations on the issue.

The programme's emcee was Mr. Prem Dangal, the secretary general of ANPA, in which Mr. D. D. Devkota, vice chairperson, ANPA, had earlier delivered welcome speech and Mr. Balram Banskota, secretary, ANPA had offered vote of thanks.

The Rice-Day and field visit

The day 15th of Asad in Nepalese calendar and is observed as national rice day. Accordingly, a field visit was organised in nearby Bungmati, a traditional indigenous rural locality where rice transplanting was performed at mass level. All the foreign guests and representatives eagerly participated the programme. Colorful welcome dances with traditional drums and cibals ringings were other attractions. At the end of the programme, a local cultural food was served with festivities peculiar to tribals. On the occasion, an interaction programme between foreign guests and local ethnic farmers was organised to exchange views and experiences very successfully. The local people very enthusiastically participated in the discussions and told their local practices to guests. Similarly, foreigners were also in good mood to get firsthand knowledge of deep and rich rational farming practices of Nepal dating back to two millenia. The programme was very lively and fruitful.

The Second day: Seminar cum workshop session

Next day's programme was a sharing of country situation and formulating of an action plans and strategy for future. Before entering into the matter, the chairperson of the session Mr. Prem Dangal proposed the names of the participants representing all the countries of South Asia to be the part of the steering committee. The participants attending the seminar supported the idea of forming the steering committee to bring the process of the seminar forward. Mr. Biplab from India, Mr. Sarath from Sri Lanka, Mr. Regual from Bangladesh, Mr. Asim from Pakistan, Mr. Prem Dangal from Nepal and Mr. Chenaiah from India were elected as the members of the steering commiittee. The session was designed that the delegates from every country should present a country paper, comments and suggessations on these papers welcomed warmly from the floor. Then the final work was to prepare and make declaration of South Asian regional position paper.

In the morning of the day various papers from South Asian Countries were presented. The first paper of the first session was from Bangladesh. Mr. Rezual Karim Choudhury, presenting his paper reminded the conclusion that food sovereignty has increasingly been instrumental to fight against hunger and poverty. He called to struggle together against global trade policies and in favor of agrarian reform. He added that "In Bangladesh the issue of food

security is becoming critical day by day. Like most of the developing countries, agriculture plays a pivotal role in the overall economic development of the country, not only in terms of its contribution to (Gross Domestic Product) GDP, but also as a source of foreign exchange earnings. More than 70 % population depended on agriculture and they are living in rural areas. It is claimed that the country has achieved desirable objective of near self-sufficiency in rice production even with a declining cultivated area, which is 82,000 hectares went out of agriculture every year because of expansion of urban area, increase in homestead land and development of rural infrastructure. In terms of food production, land is a critical resource that plays most significant role to attaining food security. Land ownership pattern is almost like pyramid structure a few percentage of people owned a major portion of land, vulnerability and pauperization high among the small land holding".

Dr. Ramanjaneyulu presented paper on behalf of his country, India, where organic farming has increasingly been popular. The *Dalits* are uprising and farmers' awareness is playing leading role to organise and lobby for genuine agrarian reforms. He focused on the followings in order to protect food security and sovereignty: Agenda not set by the Poor or the Farmers, Alienation from Land & Productive Resources as well as Loss of their Regenerative Capacities: e.g. Small & Marginal Farmers, Forest Dependent Communities, Fisherfolks, Government Policies and Support Systems favour Unsustainable, Chemical Intensive and Export Oriented Agriculture, Large numbers of Farmers / Agricultural Workers are landless. The employment available to them is decreasing due to the mechanisation of agricultural operations, Dumping of Agricultural Produce by developed countries affect the market for the produce of domestic producers, especially the small scale producers.

Similarly, Pakistani delegate Mr. Assim mentioned in his country paper that growth in GDP has secularly eroded peasants' position in his country. He called to vote collectively in favor of agrarian reforms and frame the strong resolutions for forthcoming FAO special session on Food Security. Food Security can be defined at three levels, National / Regional, Household and Individual. Food Security at National level can be described as satisfactory balance between food supply and food demand at reasonable prices. Changes in the food security can be identified overtime by changes in the prices. Any increase in the prices will affect the poorest first as they spend a higher portion of their income on food. The imbalance between food supply and demand due to the rise in prices means that there are some households, which are food insecure because they lack entitlements to food. They have no way to express their full need for food in the market place. So, the market mechanism indicates the national level of food security.

The household level of food security is the most important because household is the basic economic unit that determines the level of consumption by the individuals. The committee on world food security has defined the household food security as "Physical and economic access to adequate food for all household members without undue risk of losing such access." It introduces the concept of vulnerability. It is assumed that income comes to the households and all resource allocation decisions are made at the household level and household consumption is divided amongst its members according to their need. So, the households are identified as food secure if their entitlement for food is greater than their needs. At the individual level, the definition of food security is more straightforward. An individual is food secure if his or her food consumption is always greater than need. Consumption is determined by the claim of individual on household food resources. This may be affected by individual's earning assets and position in the household.

Presenting his paper on behalf of host country Nepal Mr. Bam Dev Gautam explained that hunger and poverty in this region particularly in Nepal is the result of Neo-liberal policy encroachment. The WTO measures and open boarder of Nepal have facilitated dumping of cheaper farm outputs across the boarder rather than alleviation of peasants' poverty. The production of local food products has seriously gone down as the multinational products snatched away their local market .He proposed to call WTO out of agriculture right from FAO special session. a genuine agrarian reforms is to be accomplished as soon as possible allowing the productive forces the right of access to productive resources including land. Peasants toiling land without having right should be ensured their right over it. By giving a small plot of land does not solve the problem. Therefore, a package of agricultural development is to be implemented so that peasants' rights are protected, profitable price of their products can be ensured, local market can be protected and finally agricultural revolution can be taken place. Likewise protection of bio-diversity and maximum utilization of it is also another task before the state. A principle of protection and access of land, forest, water, bi-diversity (Jamin, Jal, Jadibuti and Jungle) should be established. The peasants should be brought into the process in protecting all those elements so that they will have right over them and feel ownership over the resources. Peasants only can protect their resources and utilize them properly as per their needs. There is also urgent need of getting a peasants' act, court and commission. We have to have a series of campaign to achieve all of them. Another import component of our movement is to achieve food sovereignty. Peasants' movement of the country should carry those components as part of its main demands and concerns. Agricultural development is entering into commercialization and agro-industrialization. Therefore, the peasants' movement should also follow the productive system and patten. Looking at this dimension, ANPA has also changed its organizational pattern accordingly and have formed various subjective organizations based on production.

Similarly, Sarath Fernando enlightened the house with glaring experience of Srilanka and voted to move along South Asian regional peasants' sprit of dignity and respect. Mr. Fernando said "gobalization enslaves the whole of humanity and threatens to destroy nature beyond recovery. Prevention of this destruction and creation of something new is the most important task in hand. Resistance has picked up momentum throughout the world. The World Social Forum process has become the expression of this resistance, which brings hope. We from Sri Lanka would like to join this process in order to add our little bit of strength, but also to gain a lot more strength for our struggle in Sri Lanka. What we would like to present today is the story of perhaps the most desperate crisis that our people are facing right now in Sri Lanka, which could be one of the strongest illustrations of the tragic consequences of globalization. It is also a story that tells us about the tremendous potential for us to build something new.

The later half of the plenary was devoted to floor discussion. Local indigenous farmers, Dalits and landless peasants, women peasants, agricultural scientists, media people, cultural activist and many other experts from different sections of the society lively participated in the discussion. Altoghter 34 people spoke on the occasion richly contributing the proposals to be included in the draft of the declaration.

Second session: Preparing strategy, action plans and declaration

During the lunch the steering committee headed by Mr. Biplab Halim of India prepared further proceeding of the seminar and presented it before the session. The second session of the

day was presided over by Mr. Biplab. Half of the second session was allocated for the discussion of the strategy and plan of actions. The participants were asked to share their strategy to achieve the food security and food sovereignty in the region and in their respective countries. Various participants spoke out on the topic. Then the steering committee met again and prepared a draft to be finalized by the participants of the seminar. After getting suggestion and inputs from the participants an action plans was approved. After a short brake, the house was again called for the final session where the final draft declaration was presented. After comments and amendments the declaration was made final unanimously late afternoon. The house was called off by singing farmers unity song every member raising their hands high.

The final day: Press conference

The third and final day a grand press conference was held to make the declaration the public. The leading dailies covered the news wide and on the next day electronic media broadcasted the main contents of the declaration on the top story. Thus, the programme of South Asian Regional Seminar on preparing inputs for FAO Special Session of the committee on Food Security' came to successful conclusion in Kathmandu.

Annex-2 contains all papers for serious readers' references

The outcome

The two day programme of 'South Asian Regional Seminar on preparing inputs for FAO Special Session of the committee on Food Security' thus, was successfully concluded in Kathmandu achieving the still wider understanding and deeper unity amongst the peasants' leaders and high level activists who are fighting head and shoulder in the challenging fronts of their respective countries. The major outcomes of the programme are:

- 1) Updating the current information's, experiences and warmth amongst the leaders of South Asian Peasants communities
- 2) Declaration of common Position Paper on regional level on food and related issues as inputs for FAO Special Session
- 3) Mobilization and activsing of Nepalese activists on peasants fronts in national level that covered representatives from Mechi in the east to Mahakali in the west
- 4) Revitalization and reinvigoration of high moral of local grass-root level activists
- 5) Introduction of Nepalese agri practices and local cultures to foreign friends via field visits and trips
- 6) Common understanding and mutual concern to develop alternative to current WB-IMF dominated corporate liberalization and its prodigee WTO regime.
- 7) WTO, out of agriculture – the common slogan of peasants' communities in South Asian Region.

We achieved the followings:

- A concrete action plans for the SAAPE's network on Food Sovereignty were drawn during the program.
- A common declaration as a plat forum for the groups and organizations involved in the process was adopted.
- The issues of security and food sovereignty was very much visible and highlighted
- Various new activists knew our issues and the campaign
- All the medias (print and electronic) were mobilized
- Government representative and senior agri-scientists and researchers took part the program.
- Local farmers and indigenous people were also brought into the process through rice planting activities.
- Multi-sectors representations were ensured in the program: participants from peasants' organisations, civil society organisations, Agricultural scientist, women, indigenous people, Dalit, Students, labour, peasant women, fisher folk, Shepherds, NGOs, other mass organizations, artisans, peoples cultural activists, media, youth, researchers and trade union movements took part the program
- Local issues were also highlighted during the rice planting activities
- Few new groups and organizations from South Asian Countries were brought into the process.

Impact of the program

- The program strengthened the local network very much.
- It has empowered the participants
- It has consolidated ANPA's and SAAPE's relationship

Recommendations and Follow-up Activities Identified:

- ANPA and SAAPE have to make the issue of FS a major issues in our local campaign
- It has to be a core issue of our training program
- We need to work with other various NGOs in national/regional level within the FS.
- Meetings have to be organized with high level government official and local FAO
- World Food Day should be observed collectively
- Establish a forum for FS in national level
- Influence national/regional and international government forum to achieve FS
- Some activities should be carried out during the up coming FAO SPECIAL SESSION to be held in the last week of October this year.
- Carry out activates to assert the rights of the peasants' in up coming constituent assembly in Nepal

Annex-1
Kathmandu Declaration

Food Sovereignty as frame work for Food and Agriculture Policies

Declaration at 'South Asian Regional Seminar on preparing inputs for FAO Special Session of the committee on Food Security'

30th June, 2006

Katmandu, Nepal

We, the people of South Asia representing farmers, agricultural workers, indigenous people, Dalits, peasant women, fisher folk, Shepherds, NGOs, mass organizations, students, artisans, peoples cultural activists, media, youth, researchers, agricultural scientists and trade union movements assembled in Katmandu, Nepal on June 29th and 30th 2006 on the occasion of 'South Asian Regional Seminar on preparing inputs for FAO Special Session of the committee on Food Security' reaffirm that 'Food Sovereignty is the inalienable right of peoples, communities and countries to define decide and implement their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food which means that all people have right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and technologies and ability to sustain themselves, their resources and societies'.

In order to achieve the goal of Food Sovereignty we demand an International Convention on Food Sovereignty and peasant rights in order to enshrine the principles of food sovereignty in international law and institute food sovereignty as the principal policy framework for addressing food and agriculture.

On this occasion we also demand that the national governments should declare food sovereignty as a fundamental right and incorporate in the national constitutions. In order to achieve these we also strongly demand that all the national governments in South Asia must take immediate steps to

- Implement genuine agrarian reforms ensuring land to tillers and landless peasants
- Raise voices demanding WTO out of Agriculture
- Pursue the spirit of Convention on Biodiversity with active participation of peasants
- Ensure no privatization of common productive resources land and water, social services and life forms
- Ensure women's equal participation and rights in all respects of socio-economic life including proportional representation
- Ensure no patent rights on life forms
- Ensure no biopiracy
- Say no to Genetic Engineering in agriculture
- Stop conversion of agricultural lands to non agricultural use and from food to non food crops
- Ensure implementation of fair prices to farmers and fair share in the price

- Maintain national sovereignty of taking economic decisions-rejecting blanket privatization and liberalization
- Declare a time bound plan to implement regenerative and sustainable agriculture nation wide.
- Ensure farmers Sovereign right over seed
- Declare guaranteed employment with minimum and equal wages without gender discrimination.
- Not to sign any agreements which lead to dumping of agriculture products
- Establish peasants' commission headed by peasants.
- Initiate appropriate acts and mechanisms to protect the interests of peasants.
- Protect and promote indigenous knowledge of farming and artisan communities.
- Respect farmers' rights of the other countries.
- Ensure representation of peasants and peasants' associations in legislative bodies.
- Ensure genuine peasants participation in any decision affecting farming communities.

We also demand that IFIs should be within the governance framework of United Nations. We also demand enactment and effective enforcement of peasants' law through peasant courts where ever necessary.

In this context we also commit ourselves to

- Promote local resource based, regenerative, sustainable models in agriculture
- Research, document, and share experiences in sustainable agriculture across the region
- Establish research centers to work on sustainable agriculture
- Study and document the adverse effects of neo liberal economies
- Take up regional and national campaigns against IFIs
- Support farmers to actively reject GM crops and chemicals in agriculture
- Strengthen the existing regional networks working for the peasants rights
- Conduct public hearings on atrocities of MNCs
- Organize and support local struggles of farmers and agriculture workers
- Take up advocacy on right to food
- Launch a campaign for genuine land reforms
- Identify small organizations and strengthen them to represent at world conventions
- Have Farmers Exchange
- Run a quarterly newsletter as a networking tool
- Conduct series of workshops/trainings on food sovereignty
- Take up annual budget analysis and ensure more allocation for agriculture

On this occasion we acknowledge the initiative taken by ANPA with assistance from SAAPE in bringing us together.

Annex-2

Contry Papers

Annex-3

List of Participants

Annex-4

Programme of the seminar