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## Calls for regional cooperation to expedite trade

**KATHMANDU**

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Experts have stressed the need for regional cooperation to expedite trade, overcome food insecurity and address climate change.

Speaking at a seminar on 'Regional Cooperation on trade, climate change and food security in South Asia: Some reflections and way forward' organized by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) in the capital on Thursday, they said that South Asian countries should work together to increase intra-regional

trade, and fight the perennial poverty that has plagued all South Asian countries.

Shankar Das Bairagi, the officiating secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, said that the need was to promote more investment in agriculture to address food insecurity in the region. "South Asian Free Trade Area should expedite work toward addressing non-tariff barriers for significant progress," he added.

Dinesh Bhattarai, an advisor to the Prime Minister, said that well-coordinated efforts at the national, regional and global levels

were necessary to minimize the impact of climate change. "Inclusive collaboration between the governments, the private sector and the relevant stakeholders is the key to address trade, climate change and food security concerns in the region," said Bhattarai.

Posh Raj Pandey, the executive chairman of SAWTEE, appreciated the positive development that have taken place in South Asia over the past few years, mainly in terms of increasing economic growth and reducing poverty. Similarly, Puspa Sharma, a research director at SAWTEE,

stressed the need to prioritize food security, saying that non-operation of the SAARC Food Bank is a testament to the region's lack of concern over growing food insecurity.

Ratnakar Adhakari, the Executive Director of Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) Secretariat, Geneva, highlighted that at present, nearly 82 percent of the total Aid for Trade funding for trade facilitation in South Asia is concentrated in Afghanistan, and therefore, there is a need to increase and diversify the funding to other South Asian countries.