

New programme aims to ease food shortage in Nepal

The government is partnering with local and international NGOs to feed people in the poorest regions when harsh winter conditions set in.

By Surath Giri for Khabar South Asia in Mugu District, Nepal

January 30, 2013

Every winter, life becomes difficult for the people of northwestern Karnali region due to food shortages that have become a perennial problem.



Residents of Okharpata Village in Mugu District face constant food shortages in winter due to adverse weather and lack of proper transportation facilities to their district. New programmes in Nepal are attempting to address these issues. [Surath Giri/Khabar]

"Due to adverse weather during winter, no crops grow in this region, and the people do not have enough to eat," Bishnu Prasad Acharya, a resident of Dhainakot Village in Mugu District, told Khabar South Asia. "Many people are forced to [migrate to India](#) in search of employment and to escape the food shortages every year."

Acharya is an administrative and finance officer for Reconstruction and Research Development Centre, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has been providing food to residents of Mugu, Kalikot, Humla, Jumla and Dolpa districts with assistance from the World Food Programme.

According to the Nepal Living Standard Survey of 2010, [poverty levels](#) in these areas are around 37%, much higher than the national average of 25.16%.

"We have been providing food to about 46,000 people through our Food for Work programme in which we ask the people to work on the community's cash crop in return for the food," he told Khabar.

Many other districts around the country face similar problems. The Global Food Security Index 2012, published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, ranked [Nepal](#) 79 out of 125 countries with a score of 35.2 out of 100 in food security. The ranking is based on the

affordability, availability, quality and safety of food.

In Nepal, food insecurity largely stems from distribution problems, according to Puspa Sharma, research director for South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE).

"Nepal's agriculture to date is largely dependent on the monsoon. Food production can fluctuate based on the timely or untimely arrival of monsoons. But still, the main cause of food insecurity is the lack of effective distribution channels to transfer food from districts with surplus production to those with a food deficit," he told Khabar.

However, efforts are being made to ensure food security throughout the country. International agencies have come forward to assist. The Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) under the Global Agriculture Fund (GAF) has recently agreed to provide Nepal with \$46.5m to enhance food security in 20 food-deficit districts in hilly and mountainous regions of far- and mid-western Nepal.

"With the programme, we intend to encourage and assist farmers in the food-deficit districts to commercialise their farming and enhance production," Ministry of Agriculture Development joint secretary Ram Prasad Pulami told Khabar.

"Many of these food-deficit districts also suffer from lack of access to markets for their cash crops. Under the programme, we are also planning to enhance farmers' access to markets for their products," he added.

The government is also contributing \$11.5m for the programme, which includes activities to create awareness about health, sanitation and nutrition, and to provide dietary support to young mothers and infants.

The programme is expected to benefit directly around 150,000 small and marginal farmers, 50,000 young mothers, children and adolescent girls, and 25,000 agricultural wage workers.

Sharma, the researcher, said the government should also work on land-use policy to ensure that farmlands are not converted to commercial venues.

"Even in areas with good food production like Terai, there is a growing trend of converting farmlands into real estate. This could lead to decline in food production nationally," he said.

"There is also a need to identify local species of crops and encourage farmers to cultivate them. These species are endemic to mid-western and far-western regions and are not affected highly by the adverse weather."