

Global Food Policy Report urges transformative action for healthy diets

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The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) launched the 2024 Global Food Policy Report: Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Nutrition at a South Asia regional event in Kathmandu, Nepal. Co-authored by 41 researchers from IFPRI and partner organisations, the report emphasises the urgent need for transformative actions to ensure sustainable healthy diets for all. The event was organised in collaboration with the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) in Nepal, with a focus on enhancing food security and transforming food systems in the region.

The report highlights a slowdown in progress on reducing undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in low- and middle-income countries while observing a rapid rise in overweight and obesity rates. This double burden of malnutrition—where undernutrition coexists with diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)—poses significant global health challenges. The report also stresses that food systems are major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation, urging their transformation to reduce environmental impacts while ensuring food security. The report estimates that over 2 billion people globally, including many in South Asia, cannot afford a healthy diet, making it crucial to address affordability and accessibility to improve nutrition outcomes.

Malnutrition remains a critical issue in South Asia, with high rates of stunting and wasting in children. Reflecting on Nepal's progress, Minister of Health and Population, Pradip Poudel, noted, "As per the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022, there has been a remarkable decrease in child mortality rate and stunting went down from 57 per cent in 2001 to 25 per cent in 2022." However, he added, "Despite the progress, a majority of women and child population still consume

unhealthy foods. The food systems have an important role in delivering high-quality diet to people, and we need to review our food systems strategies and programming linkages within the health system.â?

The report identifies poor diet quality as a major driver of malnutrition in the region. In Nepal and other South Asian countries, diets are heavily reliant on cereals and starchy roots, with low consumption of vegetables and other micronutrient-rich foods. This dietary imbalance contributes to persistent undernutrition and rising obesity rates. A significant portion of Nepalâ??s population also faces affordability constraints, with nutrient-rich foods remaining out of reach for many. Addressing these barriers is crucial for improving health and nutrition.