

1 out of 2 Indian children malnourished

International NGO indicts our system



India, with 47 per cent of its children under the age of six malnourished, ranks below countries like Bangladesh and Nepal on the state of hunger, a report says. According to the report by ActionAid, an international NGO, India stood at the 22nd spot amongst a list of 51 countries, like Australia, Britain, the US, Nepal and Bangladesh. Anne Jellema, ActionAid's international policy director, talking about the report, said: "It is the role of the state and not the level of wealth, that determines progress on hunger."

India's case showed a lot of contrasts. While the country ranked amongst the first three developing countries on the indicator for social protection, because of poor

implementation over 30 million Indians have joined the ranks of hungry since mid-1990s, the study revealed.

Babu Matthew, country director for ActionAid India, said: "The dark side of India's economic growth has been that the excluded social groups have been further marginalised, compounding their hunger, malnutrition and even leading to starvation deaths."

Meanwhile, China has been able to cut numbers of its hungry people by 58 million in ten years through strong state support for small farmers, the report said. India ranks sixth among developing nations in terms of legal framework for addressing hunger and food rights. Brazil is ranked first under this parameter.

The ActionAid report said that India has some of the best legislations for social protection amongst the developing nations on nutrition, free school meals, employment guarantee, and food subsidy for the poor and pension for vulnerable groups. However, talking about poor implementation of laws and schemes which results in them becoming futile for the common man, Amar Joyti Nayak, food rights head of the NGO, said: "Implementation remains a massive challenge in the absence of recognition of rights of the poor".

"Entitlements have to be delivered on the ground by empowering the communities and enforced earnestly with greater political will by the government," he said. "In a year when poor are reeling under crop loss due to droughts and floods in India, focus must be on supporting agriculture, especially subsistence and women farmers," Nayak added.

The report said that although the farm loan waiver enabled a boost in investment to agriculture in 2008, longer term interventions are required. Delay in payment of wages through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) further ails those who have been already starving. Jellema said: "Massive and urgent support to poor farmers, and social welfare programmes for vulnerable groups, are needed to reverse growing global hunger. At the World Food Summit next month, donor countries need to announce an additional 23 billion dollars to support these measures." (IANS 15 October 2009)