



16 December, 2025

## EVENT REPORT

# ENDING HUNGER TOGETHER:

From Episodic Relief to  
Systemic Resilience



Watch now on YouTube



# WHY THIS CONVERSATION MATTERS?

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Despite being one of the world's largest food producers, the United States continues to face widespread food insecurity. Nearly one in eight households struggles to access adequate food, with rural and under-resourced urban communities facing compounded barriers related to income, transportation, healthcare, and access to nutritious options. Hunger today is not a consequence of food scarcity, but of fragmented systems that fail to connect people to food in consistent and dignified ways.

The challenge lies in recognising hunger as more than an emergency to be managed. It is a systemic issue shaped by wages, health outcomes, geography, and policy design. When nutrition programs are rigid or poorly

aligned with local realities, communities remain vulnerable, particularly during economic shocks or public health crises. Addressing hunger, therefore, requires coordinated action across food systems, health systems, and income supports.

That is why this Policy Cafe by Sewa International USA focused on moving from episodic relief to long-term food security. By bringing together food banks, healthcare leaders, researchers, and policy practitioners, the discussion explored how community-driven solutions, when aligned with policy, can build resilience, restore dignity, and ensure that food security becomes a sustained public commitment rather than a temporary response.

## HOST & MODERATORS

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**Srikanth Gundavarapu**

Entrepreneur and civic leader based in Atlanta. Former Chapter President and key leader during Sewa International USA's COVID-19 relief efforts, contributing to large-scale emergency food distribution initiatives.



**Rakhi Israni**

Vice President of Marketing and Public Relations, Sewa International USA. Attorney and entrepreneur based in California, bringing expertise in public policy, legal frameworks, and nonprofit leadership.



**Madhav Durbha**

Supply chain technology executive, startup investor, and nonprofit leader with over 25 years of experience. Former President of Sewa's Atlanta Chapter, with extensive work addressing food insecurity, education, and healthcare access.

# THEMES

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## THEME 1:

### Community-Driven Solutions to End Hunger in the US

## THEME 2:

### Policy-Level Solutions to End Hunger in the US





# MEET OUR PANELISTS

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## **Dr. Stevens Azima**

Agricultural economist and postdoctoral researcher at the University of Vermont, specializing in food procurement, food security, and diet quality. His research examines how institutional and economic structures shape food systems.



## **Cyndy Baggett**

Vice President of Development and Marketing, Feeding the Gulf Coast. Leads fundraising, advocacy, and cross-sector partnerships across a 24-county region in the Deep South.

## **Scott Esko Brummel**

Assistant Director for Food & Nutrition Security, Duke University Office of Community Health. Leads food-as-medicine initiatives and community health partnerships integrating nutrition and healthcare delivery.



## **Bekah Clawson**

President and CEO, Second Harvest Food Bank of East Central Indiana. Nonprofit leader with extensive experience in community-driven food security and economic resilience initiatives.

## **Jada Hoerr**

Chief Resource Officer, Midwest Food Bank. Oversees organizational capacity, people, and revenue strategy supporting one of the nation's largest food distribution networks.



## **Sakeenah Shabazz**

Food and nutrition policy professional based in Washington, D.C. Former senior advisor across state and federal institutions; current fellow with the Congressional Hunger Center's Legacy Leaders Program.

# MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

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*"Emergency food helps people survive. Community-based support helps families move beyond hunger and that's where real transformation happens." - Jada Hoerr*

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## 1. Hunger Is a Moral and Systemic Failure

**Jada Hoerr** reframed hunger as a daily moral failure rather than a statistical abstraction. Drawing from Midwest Food Bank's partnerships with over 2,400 nonprofits nationwide, she emphasized that food insecurity emerges from overlapping pressures related to poverty, health, and social isolation making single-issue solutions ineffective.



*"Hunger relief doesn't always need new models—but it does need deeper alignment." - Cyndy Baggett*

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## 2. Food Deserts Reveal Unequal Systems of Access

**Cyndy Baggett** illustrated how hunger patterns reflect long-standing structural inequities. In under-resourced regions, urban food deserts coexist with rural isolation, transportation gaps, and limited nutrition-support access particularly for communities of color.



*"Nothing about us, without us. Real hunger solutions start by listening to neighbors understanding what they need and how they want support, instead of deciding for them." - Bekah Clawson*

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## 3. Hunger Is Increasingly Affecting Working Families

**Bekah Clawson** highlighted a major shift in hunger demographics: food banks are increasingly serving employed households. Rising living costs mean food becomes the most flexible, and most frequently sacrificed, line item in family budgets.

# MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

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*"Food insecurity isn't just about hunger it's about uncertainty. Not knowing when or how you'll access safe, nutritious food is part of the crisis itself." - Dr. Stevens Azima*

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## 4. Markets, Not Just Income, Determine Food Access

**Dr. Azima** explained why households enrolled in SNAP still experience food insecurity, pointing to benefit timing, price volatility, and geographic constraints. Food access, he noted, is shaped as much by market dynamics as by income support.



*"Policy matters. Programs enabled by the Affordable Care Act helped bring health systems to the table by encouraging and increasingly requiring screening for food and social needs." - Scott Brummel*

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## 5. Food as medicine: Healthcare's Role in Preventing Hunger

**Scott Brummel** positioned healthcare systems as essential partners in hunger prevention. Food-as-medicine models, supported through Medicaid pilots and hospital partnerships, demonstrate demonstrable improvements in health outcomes while reducing long-term costs



*"Hunger tracks income. Middle- and high-income households rarely face food insecurity unless disaster strikes: proof that poverty, not behaviour, drives hunger." - Sakeenah Shabazz*

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## 6. How Policy Shapes Local Solutions

**Sakeenah Shabazz** connected local realities to federal decision-making, emphasizing how legislation such as the Farm Bill shapes the feasibility of community-led solutions. Policy design, she argued, determines whether innovation can scale or remains constrained.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

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## Food Banks & Civil Society

- Expand dignity-centered, choice-based food distribution models.
- Deepen partnerships with healthcare providers and schools.
- Center lived experience in program design and evaluation.



## Health Systems

- Integrate routine food insecurity screening into care delivery.
- Fund community food partners as part of preventive health strategies.
- Support food-as-medicine models through long-term reimbursement pathways.



## Policymakers

- Strengthen and stabilize SNAP and nutrition programs against economic shocks.
- Align food, health, and income policies through systems-level planning.
- Invest in local food infrastructure, data systems, and flexible program design.

# NEXT STEPS



01

## **Strengthening Sewa's Food Programs**

Integrate insights from the Policy Cafe into Sewa's food pantry and community food initiatives, with a focus on dignity-centered distribution, nutrition awareness, and locally responsive delivery models.

02

## **Building Cross-Sector Collaboration for Hunger Resilience**

Strengthen collaboration between nonprofits, healthcare providers, researchers, and community groups to move from episodic food relief toward long-term hunger resilience.

03

## **Bridging Grassroots Practice and Policy**

Synthesize community-level insights into policy and strengthen dialogue between grassroots organizations and policymakers to support more responsive food security frameworks.

# THANK YOU!

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