

Family Farming in South Asia

KEY FIGURES

The South Asia region consisting of eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), matters to the world in terms of population, market and economy. It is home to 1.7 billion people, or 24% of the global population, with the largest youth labor force in the world. Of this, 65% of the population resides in rural areas, majority are smallholder family farmers adopting integrated farming system consisting of agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries (FAO and IFAD, 2019).

Family farmers in South Asia produce at least 70% of the foods in the region with women putting in as much from 60-98% of farm work. Yet, while South Asia is the second fastest growing region economically in the world, it is home to 216 million people living below the international poverty line of US \$1.90/day, and 14.9% of the people suffer from undernourishment in the region. Poverty in South Asia has a rural face. In this region, family farmers encounter challenges, especially low productivity, inadequate access to natural resources, production inputs (including affordable quality seeds and fertilizers, appropriate technologies, financial services, infrastructures) and markets. Other important constraints and hurdles comprise weak involvement of family farmers in decision making and governance processes in the value chains, as well as the impacts of climate change and social and political conflicts. On top of that, 50% of the unemployed in the region are youth who are less and less attracted by agriculture despite its potential for jobs creation. Lastly, the COVID19 pandemic is further exacerbating poverty and hunger; worldwide an estimated 130 million more people will go into chronic hunger and poverty by end of 2020 (FAO,2020).

South Asia stands at a crossroad in its development. The SAARC region represents 24% of world population, making it the region with the highest population density. Around 67% of its population live in rural areas and are primarily dependent on agriculture, fisheries and forestry for a living. Within this, 80% of women are engaged in farm work. Family farmers produce 70% of the food in the region; still, 66% of the world's poor live in rural South Asia. The region has high food and nutrition insecurity and increased vulnerability to climate change and other shocks.



UNDIFF in Action

The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), with co-organizers Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), and the International Cooperative Alliance-Asia Pacific (ICA-AP), and with technical assistance from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), organized the “Regional Consultation meeting on the UN Decade of Family Farming: Formulating Strategies and Action Plan to Strengthen Smallholder Family Farmers in South Asia”. The event aimed at formulating a Regional Action Plan that defines the key priorities, strategies and actions to implement the UNDIFF in South Asia and that will facilitate and promote national action plans through inclusive multi-stakeholder processes. During this meeting, government officials presented the situation of family farming in their country, as well as on-going efforts to develop a national action plan for the UNDIFF, key priorities in terms of policies, actions and studies that need to be undertaken at the regional level, and which will be further supported through a SAARC Regional Action Plan anchored to the UNDIFF Global Action Plan.

In line with the pillars of the Global Action Plan, the main objectives of the SAARC Regional Action Plan are:

- Develop a framework for collecting, processing and analysis of data set to guide SAARC Member States (SMS) for promoting FF.
- Ensure meaningful, coherent and effective political commitment and societal engagement.

- Promote Farmers' Right to strengthen family farmers for sustainable, inclusive and resilient agriculture and food systems.
- Capacity development programs on technical skills for young family farmers and their organizations provided.
- Support the enactment/ amendment of national policies and programs that will result in:
 - full engagement of women in agri-food supply chains;
 - participation in the decision-making process;
 - leadership roles (beyond the numbers) ownership management; and
 - enhanced access to social rights, education, health, and social protection for women.
- Policy on future smart foods (FSF) value chains (e.g. Neglected & underutilized species (NUS) crops, trees, livestock, fishery).
- Policy on subsidized credit supply for value chain & marketing of native products.
- Incentivize family farmers' access to sustainable and locally adaptable technologies.
- Increase the availability of smallholder-friendly, nutrition sensitive, climate-smart / climate resilient technologies and agroecological practices.

In the SAARC region, currently Nepal is the only country that has adopted a National Action Plan, while for Bangladesh the process is in development and India is at earlier stages of the process towards the NAP.



Contribution to sustainable food systems

Member states in South Asia have committed to the achievement of Agenda 2030 or the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the goals of ending hunger and poverty in the region. Family farming holds a strong potential to achieve the goals of ending hunger and poverty. The United Nations has declared 2019-2028 as the UN Decade of Family Farming. The Decade's theme, "Feeding the World, Caring for the Earth," captures the ideas that family farmers are about more than production, they are also about stewardship — stewardship of the soil, seeds, biodiversity and human-animal interactions that make up a family farm. Furthermore, the UN Secretary General has called for a Food Systems Summit in 2021. These two global processes, heightened by the COVID 19 pandemic, present tremendous opportunities for South Asia to build back better, harnessing the potentials of its 1 Billion farmers to contribute to transforming agriculture into more sustainable, just, nutritious, greener and more resilient food systems that ensure improvement of their livelihoods, well-being and prosperity towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Useful links

[ComDev Asia](#)

[UN Decade of Family Farming](#)

Afghanistan: [National Comprehensive Agriculture Priority Program Framework](#).

Bangladesh: [National Agriculture Policy 2018](#) and [National Rural Cooperative Policy 2001](#).

India: [Multi-state Cooperatives Act 2002](#), [National Policy on Cooperatives](#), [National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture](#), [National Agroforestry Policy 2014](#), and [National Initiative for Climate Resilient Agriculture](#).

Nepal: [National Cooperative Policy 2017](#), [Agriculture Development Strategy 2014 \(2015-2035\)](#), [National Agriculture Policy 2004](#), [Agribusiness Promotion Policy 2006](#), and [National Tea Policy 2000](#).

Sri Lanka: [National Agriculture Policy \(2007\)](#), [National Land Use Policy \(2007\)](#), [National Livestock Policy \(2006\)](#), [National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy \(2018\)](#), [National Policy and Strategy on Cleaner Production for the Agriculture Sector \(2012\)](#), [Trade Policy \(2017\)](#), [National Policy on Sustainable Consumption and Production \(2018\)](#), [National Rainwater Harvesting \(RWH\) Policy and Strategies \(2005\)](#), [National Seed Policy \(1996\)](#)

Bhutan: [Food and Nutrition Security Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2014](#), [Economic Development Policy 2016](#), [National Irrigation Policy 2012](#), [Land Act of Bhutan 2007](#), [Livestock Act of Bhutan 2001](#), [Seed Act of Bhutan 2000](#), [National Framework for Organic Farming in Bhutan 2006](#), [Land rules and regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2007](#), [Land Lease Rules and Regulations 2018](#), [Seed rules and regulations of Bhutan 2018](#), [Guidelines for Farm Road Development 2019](#), [DoA 12 FYP 2018-2023](#)

United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028, Regional Action Plan to Implement the UNDF and Achieve the SDGs in South Asia:
<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb5030en>



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