

Press Release

Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia: Fostering regional cooperation for sustainable and resilient agricultural adaptation

Dhaka, Bangladesh, 24 November 2021: The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and SAARC Development Fund (SDF) have launched a partnership for Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia. The central objective of the partnership is to develop evidence-based strategies to collectively tackle the impact of climate change in South Asia.

Agriculture has historically been risky business, and it is becoming riskier due to climate change and its associated impacts on agri-food systems. According to one estimate, the region could lose between 10-50 percent of crop production by end of the century due to global warming. Yet, the sector is still the main source of livelihood for over 50 percent of the population in South Asia. This reality calls for integrating climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies with overarching goal of ensuring food, nutrition, and livelihood security for millions of underprivileged and marginalized people living in the region.

The partnership will focus on promoting sustainable and resilient agricultural intensification in South Asia through building the capacity of institutions and enhancing skills, to scale-up climate smart strategies and technologies.

“The agreement will strengthen IFAD’s partnership with SAARC to work together on improving food security and to benefit smallholder agriculture in the region,” said Abdelkarim Sma, Lead Regional Economist, IFAD. “The project will look at climate-smart agriculture technologies and practices in the context of farming systems that integrate benefits for adaptation, nutrition, and women and youth.”

The consortium kicked-off with an initial pilot investment of about USD 3.1 million provided by IFAD, SAC, IFPRI and SDF. The partner organizations believe that the size of investment will grow in the coming years.

The SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC) will promote and support regional cooperation among SAARC Member States (SMS) in fostering sustainable and resilient agricultural adaptation in South Asia. Currently, cross-border cooperation between national agricultural research and extension systems (NARES) in South Asia has largely remained constrained due to lack of capacity.

“This multi-country project is the first of its kind in the region, which has been launched at a time when climate change has emerged as a major threat to the agricultural landscape,” said H. E. Mr. Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary General of SAARC. “Given what is at stake, the SAARC Agriculture Centre has taken this far-reaching initiative to promote sustainable and resilient agriculture intensification in South Asia.”

Although several agricultural policies have been implemented across South Asian countries, there is a lack of special consideration on climate change adaptation and mitigation. While there are National Adaptation Plans for Action (NAPA) for agricultural development, in the absence of evidence-based strategic investment plans they are often not put into action.

“SAARC Agriculture Centre as the Centre of Excellence can leverage regional integration through its shared vision among SAARC Member States supported by appropriate policy driven strategies addressing climate risks in South Asia,” said Dr. Md. Baktear Hossain, Director, SAARC Agriculture Centre.

IFPRI understands that research-based policy solutions can sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition. “This agreement provides us a platform for collaborative efforts to generate evidence-based policy solutions that can accelerate climate-resilient and sustainable food supply in South Asia,” said Shahidur Rashid, Director IFPRI-South Asia. “We believe climate change adaptation and sustainable agricultural intensification are inextricably linked.”

The consortium will foster partnership and cooperation to provide support on:

- 1) accelerating the identification and scaling-up of viable CSA interventions through national policies and programs in South Asia
- (2) setting-up effective and efficient mechanisms for knowledge sharing, policy dialogue, and cooperation in R&D programs among SAARC countries on CSA.

On November 24, 2021, an official launch of the project was organized in BARC Complex. During the event, SAARC member states outlined their roles and responsibilities for implementing the project. The event also highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in promoting sustainable and resilient agricultural intensification in South Asia.

The event was inaugurated by honorable Minister Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, MP Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh. “South Asia is vulnerable to climate change and related food security shocks; I commend SAARC and its partners on establishing the consortium for deepening regional cooperation, to address the impacts of climate change through streamlining climate smart strategies and technologies” said Dr. Razzaque.

A thorough mapping exercise will be conducted at regional level on the impact of climate change, to identify agro-ecosystems, and cross-disseminate viable technologies and practices which will help to accelerate impacts and outreach of the current national research efforts.

“We hope that our collective support will augment the continuous efforts of all the Member States towards enhancing the adaptive capacity of especially our smallholder farmers against the impacts of climate change,” said Officer-In-Charge of SAARC Development Fund and Director, Social Window, Mr. Anuj Goel.

The project will target to benefit smallholders focusing on women farmers, as well as researchers, extension workers, and policy makers in SAARC member countries, with a particular focus on Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka for piloting and scaling up of CSA technologies. All SAARC countries including Maldives will also benefit from capacity building and knowledge sharing activities.

About IFAD

IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have provided US\$23.2 billion in grants and low-interest loans to projects that have reached an estimated 518 million people. IFAD is an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency based in Rome – the United Nations food and agriculture hub.

About SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC)

SAC is the first Regional Centre established in 1988 by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) with a mandate to promote agricultural Research and Development as well as technology dissemination initiatives for sustainable agricultural development and poverty alleviation in the region. SAC has the responsibility to promote and support regional cooperation among SAARC Member States in fostering sustainable and resilient agricultural adaptation in South Asia. It is governed and supported directly by the Member States under the umbrella of SAARC.

About IFPRI

IFPRI provides research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition in developing countries. IFPRI was established in 1975 to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting the food needs of the developing world, with particular emphasis on low-income countries and on the poorer groups in those countries. It is a research center of CGIAR, a worldwide partnership engaged in agricultural research for development.

About SAARC Development Fund (SDF)

SAARC Development Fund (SDF) was established in April 2010 as a regional financial institution for all SAARC projects and programs. SDF's Mandate is to promote regional integration and economic cooperation. In the last eleven years, SDF has embarked on projects, forged new partnerships and initiated numerous interventions to enable SDF to become a more robust umbrella-funding institution, amply capable of delivering the benefits of regional engagement to the millions in the region through project-based collaboration. SDF operates through the three financing windows: Social, Economic and Infrastructure. SDF has about 100 projects approved by the SDF Board under the three funding windows with a fund commitment/allocation of over USD 165 million. SDF has an authorized capital of US\$ 1.5 billion and a capital base of over US \$ 560 million.

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