

Background

Agriculture plays a significant role in South Asian economy with the region being a leading producer of cereals mainly rice, wheat and maize. Nevertheless, many South Asian countries are net food importers. Shrinking land and water resources have put greater pressure on national governments to increase agricultural production per unit land area and water consumed. Immediate policy and knowledge oriented action for sustainable agricultural production is the need of the hour.

What we found

With similar cropping patterns and food consumption existing across regional borders there is great scope for knowledge sharing among South Asian countries. New technological developments with regard to crop production or value addition can be shared with neighbours, while protecting Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and innovators interest. Also, there are several identified resource efficient agricultural practices which needs to be promoted and scaled up for wider dissemination. Further, small and marginal farmers are not realising better prices for their produce due to poor access to markets, connectivity, infrastructure and post-harvest losses. The existing political, procedural and regulatory barriers in South Asian countries are also not supporting the development of regional value chains.

Instruments of Observation¹

*(Nine locations, Five countries,
Three river basins)*

- Issue specific discussion papers
- Policy specific mapping activity and report
- Policy briefs
- Diagnostic study and report
- Perception survey and report
- Compendium of sustainable agricultural practices
- Presence in media through articles

Transforming conventional agriculture to agribusiness models would shorten the supply chain fostering forward and backward linkages, requiring a favourable policy.

1 Details of the instruments of observations can be accessed at: <http://www.cuts-citee.org/SDIP/Outputs.htm>

What we achieved

Combining the extensive research and evidences from the grassroots level, CUTS arrived at two precise advocacy messages for promoting sustainable agricultural practices as well as developing regional value chains in South Asia so as to boost agricultural production and economic growth.

Promote sustainable agricultural practices	Foster regional agricultural value chains
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of sustainable agricultural practices, sharing the knowledge and facilitating scale up • Reorienting agricultural incentives to promote resource efficient agricultural technologies and sustainable practices • Engaging with community leaders and CSOs at local and subnational level in policy planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening linkages between service providers, market players and farmers through collaborative structures • Developing market infrastructure through better regulatory framework • Enhanced operations at border trade points for increased formal cross-border agricultural input-output trade and improvement in local economy • Harmonization of laws and regulations and reducing non-tariff barriers

To adapt and consummate the advocacy messages in the South Asian context, location specific engagement platforms were created to try, test and evolve the advocacy messages.² The targeted change agents at these engagement platforms included policy makers, government officials, farmers, CSOs, academia and media at local, sub-national, national and sub-regional levels.

Engagement Platforms		
Country	Strategy Level	Strategy Format
Bangladesh	Sub-national	1. Advocacy workshop on agriculture at Chapainawabganj (Ganges) and Kurigram (Brahmaputra)
Bhutan	Sub-regional	2. Advocacy workshop on vegetable marketing at Samdrup Jongkhar
India	Sub-national	3. Consultation on Farmer Producers Organisation (FPOs) at Siliguri
	Sub-national	4. Media sensitisation workshops on cross border agricultural value chain at Agartala and Guwahati
	National	5. Advocacy workshop on Valuing vital resources: a reform approach for pricing of water, energy and food in India at Delhi

² Details of the discussions at the engagement platform can be accessed at: <http://www.cuts-citee.org/SDIP/Advocacy.htm>

Country	Strategy Level	Strategy Format
	Sub-regional	6. Policy dialogue on fostering agricultural value chains in eastern South Asia at Guwahati
	Sub-national	7. Engaging periodically at District Agricultural Development Forum (DADF) in Uttar Pradesh
	Sub-national	8. Advocacy event on sustainable agriculture in changing climate scenario at Lucknow
	National	9. Advocacy workshop on fertilizer policy of India at Lucknow
	Sub-national	10. Consultation on Farmer Producers Organisation (FPOs) at Patna
	Sub-national	11. Consultation on agricultural value chain and market linkages in Bihar and West Bengal at Patna
	Sub-national	12. One to one advocacy meetings held with six state level officials in agriculture and marketing department in Assam
	Sub-national	13. Dissemination meeting on sustainable agricultural practices at Guwahati
	Sub-regional	14. Legislative engagement with India and Pakistan stakeholders for the promotion of agriculture at Chandigarh
	Sub-national	15. Advocacy event on agriculture in Punjab and status of small and marginal farmers at Chandigarh
South Asia	Regional	16. Regional Dialogue on exploring trans-boundary cooperation in agriculture, water and energy

Insights from engagement platforms

The insights from the engagement platforms on sustainable agricultural practices revealed remarkable solutions. For example, the use of stress-tolerant varieties like *Sahbhagi Dhan* would be ideal as an adaptation strategy to climate change and drought conditions. This needs to be fed into the policy framework for agriculture. Similarly, the input subsidy regime for seeds, fertilizer, power and irrigation facilities was a widely debated topic at the engagement platforms. The platforms also yielded solutions for resource saving practices like micro-irrigation, availing subsidies through government schemes like *Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana* (PMKSY) in India. A sweeping suggestion for adopting sustainable agricultural practices was engaging communities with local CSOs and media.

The insights on fostering regional agricultural value chains and market access from the engagement platforms were specific in terms of action points. A common suggestion was that agricultural traders need sensitisation about the existing rules and regimes for cross-border trade which could be achieved through capacity building in FPOs and CSOs. The need to transform conventional agriculture into agri-business model by entrepreneurship development workshops and promoting organic farming was another solution. The importance of improving regulatory frameworks for market infrastructure through better storage facilities, addressing private sustainability standards issues and multi-modal connectivity was also pointed out.

What needs to be done

CUTS engagement platforms revealed pathways for prospective advocacy work in enabling action-oriented policy in agriculture. CUTS identified these pathways and the change makers to be targeted in agriculture. For future actions and prospective programme objectives, CUTS is exploring potential pathways to attain these changes in agriculture.

Locations	Prospective Pathways	Targeted Change makers
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan	<p>1. Identify sustainable agricultural practices, share knowledge, and facilitate scale-up of practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and document sustainable agricultural practices for each agro-climatic situation • Conduct pilot demonstrations of successful sustainable practices • Capacity building for extension staff and local NGOs on resource efficient technologies and practices, e.g. micro-irrigation and alternate wetting and drying of crops • Promote water resource management for better irrigation and energy use • Popularise the use of stress-tolerant varieties and timely supply or inputs through advocacy with relevant governments and private associations • Design and popularise the use of soil health cards 	Farmer Groups, CSOs, Department of Agriculture, Agricultural University
India	<p>2. Review the current input subsidy regime for reorienting agricultural incentives to promote resource efficient agricultural technologies and sustainable practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide recommendations and advocate for extending market-based incentives, such as enabling diversification in cropping patterns and procurement 	Policymakers, Ministry of Agriculture (GoI)
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan	<p>3. Facilitate engagement between governments, communities, CSOs and the media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise events and follow-up activities with stakeholders to devise adoptable technical and social adaptive agriculture strategies • Coordinate and mediate best practices and promoting technologies at the community level as well as providing feedback to public agencies 	Farmer Groups, Department of Agriculture, Media

Locations	Prospective Pathways	Targeted Change makers
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan	<p>4. Strengthen linkages between service providers, market players and farmers through collaborative structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote piloting and expanding FPOs and cooperatives SHGs as successful models Sensitise traders about the existing rules and regimes of cross-border trade Facilitate interfaces with producers, traders and regulators to bridge gaps in responsibilities Propose Joint Research Centres to be established on the India-Pakistan border 	Farmer Groups, Input Traders, Seed Associations, Agricultural University
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan	<p>5. Capacity building and skills development of farmers to transform conventional agriculture to agribusiness models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct capacity building and skills development with farmers, involving government officials, media, and other local stakeholders, in crop diversification, market oriented crop production and primary processing to assure quality of produce Promote public policies to focus on increasing private investment in market development and agro-processing units 	Farmer Groups, Agricultural University
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal	<p>6. Promote better regulatory framework for market infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide research findings and promote improved connectivity using multiple modes - road, rail and water ways - to reduce the cost of production Provide research findings and promote a single market for produce, increase border <i>Haats</i> operations, and improved market infrastructures of storage facilities and Provide recommendations and advocate for harmonisation of trade standards in the region, including addressing private standards Provide recommendations and advocate for reducing non-tariff barriers to promote cross-border trade through multiple modes of transport 	Policymakers, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Agriculture

Pathways to Change

