

ASIAN FARMERS AND IYFF : WHAT IS IT FOR US DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING ?



ISSUE PAPER
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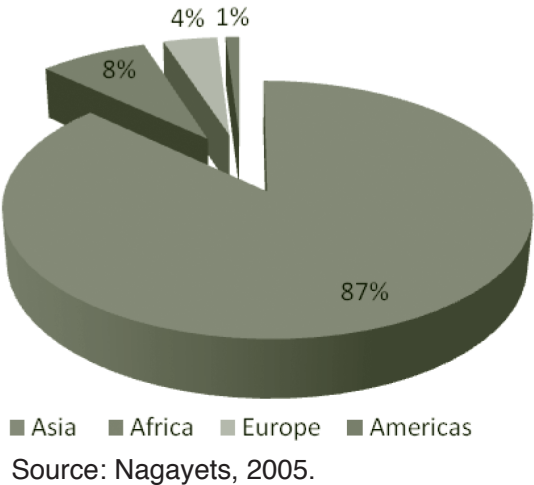
**Asian Farmers' Association
for Sustainable
Rural Development**

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Anamitra stood up and wiped her brow. She let her eyes roam around the vegetable field where she has been working since early morning. She saw her husband tilling the fields on the other side. Her family has always worked these fields and she felt proud that it has supported them ever since. But tears welled up in her eyes as she realized that like their neighbors they might be losing the field soon. While her family has indeed tilled the lands for generation, they have yet to receive the formal title to the said land like all her neighbors in the community. And now the representative of the agribusiness company has started talking to her and the other farmers in the area. They were told that they have to leave their land as the government has sold it to them and they will soon convert the land into a palm oil plantation.

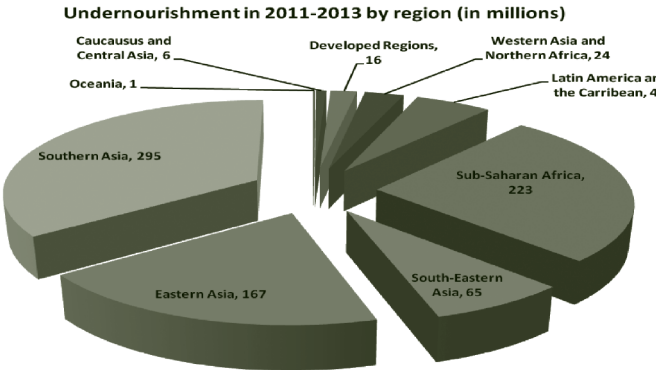
Anamitra and her family are small-scale family farmers. They belong to the 3 billion people who live in the world's rural areas, most of them in developing countries. Of these, 2.5 Billion are men and women farmers engaged in family farming while the remaining hundred million are agricultural workers. Less than 20million of the rural population are involved in industrial agriculture. Of this 2.5 billion, more than 1.5 billion work 404 million plots measuring less than 5 hectares in size, with the majority of these plots measuring less than one hectare. Nagayets (2005) broke this down stating that 87% of the world's 500 million small farms of less than 2 hectares are in Asia and Pacific, Africa (8%), Europe (4%) and Americas (1%). (see Figure 1) . China , with 193 million farms have the highest numbers of family farms , or 39% of the world's small farms , followed by India with 93 million or 23% . Both Indonesia and Bangladesh accounts for 17million per, and Vietnam 10 million.

Regional Distribution of Small Farms



The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that in the period 2011-2013, at least 842 million people – 12 % of the global population – are hungry and malnourished, i.e. unable to meet their dietary energy requirements. At least 827 million (or 98%) of them live in developing regions . At least half of the 842 million hungry people around the world are engaged in smallholder farming, most of whom survive by tilling marginal areas prone to natural disasters like floods and droughts. Of these, 20 % belongs to landless families dependent on farming like Anamitra and about 10 % live in communities whose livelihoods depend on herding, fishing or forest resources. The remaining 20 % live in shanty towns in the periphery of the biggest cities in developing countries. The numbers of poor and hungry city dwellers, most of whom are also rural folks either displaced or who have chosen to migrate to cities in search of opportunities, are rising rapidly along with the world's total urban population. Sixty three percent (527 million out of 842 million) of these people are in Asia, despite having the most number of family farmers. (SOFI, 2013)

Figure 2: Undernourishment in 2011-2013 by region (in millions)



Source: SOFI, 2013

Survey results (WCA, 2010) show that in Asia, a higher percentage share of female children are underweight than male and a higher percentage of those living in rural areas are more undernourished than those in urban areas. South Asia ranks highest in Asia's percentage share of women adult population with Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED). Inadequate food intake is one of the major reasons of undernourishment.

Burdened by poverty, limited access to resources, climate change effects and lack of governmental support, small farms and family farms are fast disappearing. And this is very unfortunate. Family farmers are the planet's primary food producers. In fact , in Asia, they produce 80% of the total

food needed to ensure food security of the region. (RAP report, 2013). Studies have also shown that many of the successful sustainable agro ecological approaches (approaches that can help combat climate change and reverse detrimental effects of industrial and monoculture farming over the last three decades) are also innovations by family farmers in Asia.

This is the potential force that can be harnessed to ensure that the world has enough food to feed everybody and at the same time care for it. There is a need therefore for a radical intervention that will help resolve the problems besetting family farming to turn it around and make it a viable source of income and livelihood for small farmers and fishers.

WHAT IS FAMILY FARMING?

As opposed to agribusiness or corporate farming, FAO defined family farming as “a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family, both female and male. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, reproductive, social and cultural functions. A family farm is an agricultural landholding which is managed and operated by a household and where farm labor is largely supplied by that household.”(FAO, 2013) In the context of most Asian countries, family farmers are smallholders, small scale food producers - farmers, fishers, pastoralists and herders and gatherers of forest resources.

What is the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF)?

The International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) is an advocacy to put family farming into its rightful place as the core of genuine development in the South.

In 2006, the World Rural Forum (WRF) initiated a campaign with hundreds of civil society organizations working around the world. The campaign is aimed at urging the United Nations (UN) to declare an IYFF as a means to celebrate family farming and to create opportunities that would ensure sustainable family agriculture development in the medium and long term especially in the face of massive threat against it. In Asia, the forerunners of the campaign were Asian Farmer's Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) and Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia

(AsiaDHRRA). After the Global Farmers Forum organized by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in February 2010, the Annual Conference June 2010 of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in October 2010, all in Rome, the campaign targeting UN became a success.

In December 2011, the United Nations officially proclaimed 2014 as the “International Year of Family Farming or IYFF.” According to FAO, “the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) aims to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farming by focusing world attention on its significant role in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development, in particular in rural areas.” (FAO 2012)

FAO hopes that the IYFF would help reposition family farming so that it can be “at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas by identifying gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development.” FAO wants to “promote broad discussion and cooperation at the national, regional and global levels to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges



faced by smallholders and help identify efficient ways to support family farmers.”

It is based on the premise that if family farming can be given greater or even equal access to resources and production inputs, fair prices for their produce and improved government policies and support, it will not only be able to improve the living conditions in the rural areas but that it would address

massive rural poverty, contribute immensely to reducing hunger around the world and will promote environment-friendly and more sustainable farming methods and technologies.

As family farming is inadequately addressed by policy makers, the International Year of Family Farming will hopefully provide the opportunity to promote agreement between policymakers and rural populations, on the real contribution of family farming to rural development and to promote it as the model for sustainable agricultural development. The IYFF aims to present the challenges and difficulties faced by family farming, and to highlight



its contribution, both real and potential, to reducing and fighting poverty and hunger around the world.

It should be noted however that the IYFF is “not an end in itself but as the beginning of a process in which, through a succession of events, family farming and its many professional associations will be recognized as the leading force of their own rural development.” (FAO 2012)

WHY IS THERE A NEED TO PROTECT FAMILY FARMING?

In Asia and the Pacific, family farms dominate the landscape. It is home to 60 % of the world’s population and to 70% of the world’s family farmers. About 40% and 90% of farmers in each country in Asia and Pacific are small scale food producers, farmers, fishers and herders. Family farmers produce 80 % of the total food needed to ensure food security of the region (RAP report, 2013).

The higher productivity of family farms are normally due to higher use of labor and other

family-owned inputs, and a generally higher index of cropping intensity and diversification even with smaller capital. Experience has shown that Asian countries such as India that promoted small family farms were able to launch the Green Revolution. Countries like China started supporting smallholder farming after collective farms could not provide adequate incentives to increase production and productivity. The inverse relationship between farms size and productivity is a powerful rationale for land reform policies, including land redistribution for both efficiency and equity gains.

However, family farmers are faced with many challenges that threaten their very existence worldwide. The profitability and over-all viability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries production has always been subject to the vagaries of weather, social, political, technical, and economic factors, but the years of non-prioritization of the sector led to it being more vulnerable when the 2008 worldwide food, financial and energy crisis happened. The persistence of hunger and malnutrition in Asia, especially among family farmers, is largely due to the fact that poverty is basically a rural problem in the region. (Balakrishnan, 2013)

Many poor rural people in Asia share a number of economic, demographic and social characteristics, the most common of which is limited access to land or landlessness. They also suffer from lack of access to basic necessities like water, sanitation and electricity. Their access to resources like credit, farming implements, technology is severely limited. They are also constrained by other factors which include the lack of market information, entrepreneurial skills, bargaining power—making them vulnerable and less competitive. (Rural Poverty Portal, 2013)

Extreme weather events are also increasing the vulnerabilities of poor rural people worldwide. The Asian region is particularly vulnerable. Studies show that the Asia/Pacific region accounted for 91% of the world’s total death and 49% of the world’s total damage due to natural disasters in the last century. (IFAD, Global Mechanism, 2009) In East Asia, China, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam are most at risk with floods; the Philippines, Vietnam, and China for storms; and Vietnam, Indonesia, China, and Myanmar, for coastal areas. (World Bank, 2009)

The conversion of lands previously devoted to food production to varying land use such as subdivisions, large scale production (mono-

cropping system) for feeds, biofuels production, speculation on agricultural commodities, and frequent natural disasters have resulted to the volatility of food prices around the world , severely affecting family farmers, as they are also consumers, spending as much as 70% of their incomes for food needs.

The continuing decline of farming incomes and the resultant poverty is causing the disappearance of family farms as many choose to migrate to urban areas in a vain search for opportunities and a chance for better lives. Aside from migration, farming is fast becoming an occupation of the elderly as a huge segment of the rural youth is not going into farming anymore.

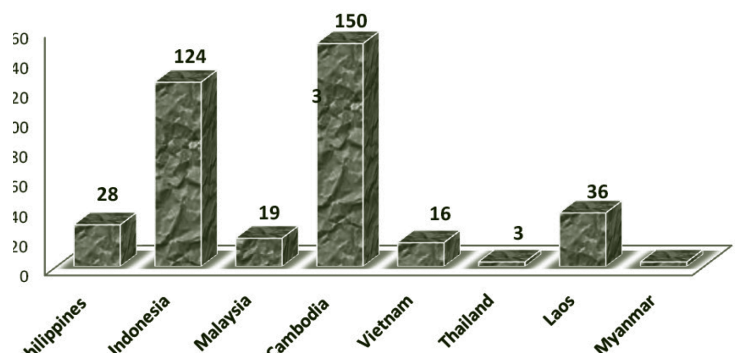
Adding to the problem is the increasing cases of land grabbing in rural areas. The 2008 crisis spawned a global rush for land as countries realized the importance of agriculture and its role in securing their country's food and energy needs. In the main, these agricultural land investments are mostly driven by the demand to secure food (especially after the food crisis that hiked the price of food), the demand for alternative fuel sources (i.e. agro-fuels or biofuels in lieu of the energy crisis and climate change), increasing demand for climate mitigation measures (i.e. relocation of high carbon emitting agriculture production in other countries) and as mentioned above the current revaluation of land as an attractive "asset portfolio" by these investing entities. (Obanil, 2012)

According to the Land Matrix, Asia is second to Africa in terms of the number of hectareage affected by land deals, with Africa having 15,632,169 hectares and Asia with 5,938,486 hectares affected by large land deals. Globally, there are 1,054 deals in various stages of negotiations, 73 of which has either been cancelled or negotiations has failed. Of the 807 deals being implemented currently,



615 are agricultural land deals. Of the 807 deals in existence around the world, Southeast Asia is hosting 379 land deals covering agriculture, conservation, forestry, industry, renewable energy, tourism and other deals. This represents 46% of the total of 807 deals but does not include yet agricultural land deals which are being negotiated but not yet concluded. (ILC, 2013) (see Figure 3)

Figure 3. Number of Land Deals per country in Asia, 2013



Source: ILC, 2013

As most of these investments in agriculture do not really target idle land, but productive small farms, family farmers lose their lands as plantations are put up where family farms used to thrive. Such is the case of the small farmers in Cambodia, where economic land concessions (ELCs) and land grabbing perpetrated by the elite have resulted to the displacement of and human rights violations against family farmers as most of them do not have legal land titles or certificates proving their security of tenure. (Guttal, 2006)

In fact, land grabbing in the guise of investment is also partly responsible for some government's withdrawal of support to the sector. Many governments had stopped supporting or provide only marginal support to their own rural sector as they now primarily rely on private investments to support the "development" of their agricultural sector.

Unfortunately, this further weakened family farmers. In most cases, family farmers have very limited capacity to sufficiently cope or ward off the adverse effects of natural disasters or crises that affect the agricultural sector, but the new developments in the sector further weakened their already stretched capacity.

With regards to public spending, from 1980 to 2002, Asia's public spending for education and social security has seen a steady increase, but the

region's spending on agriculture has decreased by 50%. Though agriculture remains the largest sector in the rural area in Asia, spending as a percentage of total GDP has remained constant at 8–10 % in the same period which is unfortunate given the crisis that hit the region in 1997. (Fan, 2013)

Since the needs of family farms are traditionally poorly addressed by policy makers and the focus of support has always been on commercial farming and agribusiness, the IYFF provides a rare opportunity not only to put agriculture in the center of discussions, but more specifically to argue for the important role and contribution of family farms to the development of the sector and why it is the sustainable alternative to agribusiness and corporate farming.

WHAT ARE THE REAL AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF FAMILY FARMING?

Studies around the world have shown that family farming, if properly supported, can contribute to reducing poverty, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by providing jobs, bringing more income to the family, and making sure that the environment and resources are managed sustainably. The 2008 World Bank report "Global Development: Agriculture for Development" stated that "GDP growth originating in agriculture is twice as effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth generated in other sectors."

In fact, countries which implemented agricultural policies that promoted the development of small holders have experienced broad-based development that benefitted not only their agricultural sector but other sectors as well. In Asia, the development of countries like Japan, South Korea, China and Vietnam have been greatly aided by their long-term and strategic support to small holders. As farmers increased and diversified their production aided by the public investments of their governments, the productivity of the agricultural sector increased, resulting to increased income which allowed them to purchase food for their families and to invest more on their production. In turn, this lessened the incidence of poverty, hunger and unemployment in the countryside, and discouraged rural exodus and migration to urban centers.

At present, family farming contributes to the world food supply by producing 70% of its output. But it has more potential to be further productive

if supported. The myth has always been that agribusinesses are more productive and more efficient than family farms as they produce more per worker mainly because of mechanization. But this has long been proven False. In fact, it has been shown that both in developed and developing countries, family farms have higher productivity per hectare as they use more intensive farming methods and utilize crops that are better adapted to the labor available. Because they use the whole family workforce to produce on the little plots that they have, they also help reduce unemployment in the rural areas.

Family farmers more often would invest their extra income to further boost their production. A family farmer that has a good harvest or gets good crop prices will always invest the extra money in the farm, as it is their home as well as their livelihood. Even if these investments are not always directly productive, the resultant benefits directly accrue to the family, helping it further maintain the farm.

Family farming also provides alternative farming methods that help conserve natural resources and renew the soil. As opposed to the monocultures perpetuated by agribusinesses which has resulted to poorer topsoil due to their heavy dependence on chemicals, pollution, poor diversity and more harmful pests, family farmers often use diversified farming methods that actually preserve the soil and the bio-diversity of the areas surrounding their farms.

Family farmers also help build stronger rural communities since they are more integrated in the local economy. Ongwen and Wright (2007) claim that "keeping a farmer on (his/)her land is keeping three other jobs going, because (he/)she uses shops, schools and services." Thus, small farms not only help reduce unemployment, but also help in maintaining a vibrant local economy that can help build stronger rural communities.

More importantly, family farming helps empower women. There is an estimated 1.6 billion women farmers who often head their own households (Women World Summit Foundation, Geneva). The agricultural labour force in developing countries is comprised significantly of women, estimated at 43% by the FAO while UNIFEM estimates this at 60-80%. Yet FAO estimates that 60 % of the world's hungry are women. This is very unfortunate since women are the world's primary food producers. Given the same access to and control of resources linked to land, technology, training and credit,

women can increase food production by 20 to 30%.

WHAT IS AFA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE IYFF CAMPAIGN?

AFA is an alliance of national farmers organizations in Asian countries envisioning happy, healthy and empowered lives of their members and communities. Majority of the world's family farmers are in Asia, and they are also the majority of the world's poorest. Asia is also home to many successful farmer-led agriculture innovations. The IYFF is an opportunity to highlight the situation and initiatives of small scale farmers in Asia as well as to strengthen engagement with policy makers in enacting favorable policies for family farmers.

AFA has six priority policy agenda for family farmers : (1) recognition of small scale farmers especially women; (2) secured rights to basic production resources mainly land, waters, forests and seeds; (3) promotion of sustainable agro-ecological approaches; (4) strengthen market power ; (5) significant involvement in policy –making processes of governments ; (6) attract youth in agriculture. At the national level, each member organization will actively take part in the establishment of national , multi-stakeholder IYFF committees, who will then identify and work on at least one priority agenda that can bring concrete gains this year for the family farmers. At the regional level, AFA will continue to advocate for the establishment of an ASEAN Farmers Advisory Council in Southeast Asia and will start an FO-SAARC partnership for its programs on food banks in South Asia.

To promote IYFF and make it worthwhile for its members and larger constituency, AFA is pursuing several strategies :

- 1) Education and Sensitization , - promoting and popularizing the IYFF among FOs, government agencies, inter-governmental agencies, and other NGOs at national and at regional levels.
- 2) Research – conduct of policy researches on the six priority agenda, production of issue papers that will be translated in the languages of the members, documentation of successful farmer –led innovations in production and marketing aspects of farming that result to increased incomes and better living conditions. AFA will also conduct consultations on the issues of young farmers and women farmers in Asia.

- 3) Capacity building and Training - Trainings on constructive engagement and para-legal training , technical assistance to its members , farmer's visits and exchange visits to showcase successful models of farmer-led sustainable production and agri-based enterprises . AFA will prepare training modules or short videos on farmer-led agriculture innovations and ensure that these materials are highly accessible to by maintaining the website and regularly uploading the different knowledge materials that will be produced.
- 4) Mobilization - mobilization activities will be done synchronized with the celebration of World Food Day and national farmers' day in each country.
- 5) Policy Dialogues- AFA will initiate policy dialogues and conduct lobbying activities at national and regional levels to promote the IYFF. AFA will also network with targeted support groups to ensure that national committees are established—with multi-stakeholders as part of the national IYFF committee.
- 6) Networking - Maximize IYFF in creating, enlarging and strengthening networks, linkages and partnerships with other stakeholders - NGOs, academe and research institutions, governments, development partners .Through networking and synergy of efforts among various stakeholders, we can strengthen our advocacy with governments to adopt policies and programs that will directly support and put more emphasis to family farming. More budget can be allocated for public investments that support small holder agriculture rather than continue to promote agribusiness. More programs that promote more sustainable farming practices especially those developed by family farmers and encourage the adoption of these practices by other farmers. More support to initiatives that will help provide the needed capital, rural infrastructure and extension services to help family farmers further in improving their production.



CONCLUSION

As national and regional organization of small scale women and men farmers, we want concrete gains to be felt by our members this International Year of Family Farming. The IYFF can bolster the important role of both women and men in food production and the potential that they have in ensuring food security, nutrition and well being of small farming families. Let us all seize the momentum, and work in synergy with other stakeholders so that family farmers can happily feed the world and care for the earth, not only this year in 2014, but in the 2025 and even in 2050 as well.

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