



JOINT COMMUNIQUE

The South Asia region consisting 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 1.7Billion people, or 24% of the global population, with the largest youth labor force in the world¹. Of this, 65% of the population resides in rural areas², majority are smallholder family farmers³ 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.⁴

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/day⁵, and 14.9% of the people suffer from undernourishment in the region⁶. 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

¹ https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP2019_10-Key-Messages_GZ_8AUG19.pdf

² [https://tradingeconomics.com/south-asia/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html#:~:text=Rural%20population%20\(%25%20of%20total,compiled%20from%20officially%20recognized%20sources.](https://tradingeconomics.com/south-asia/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html#:~:text=Rural%20population%20(%25%20of%20total,compiled%20from%20officially%20recognized%20sources.)

³ FAO defines Family Farming as a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production that is managed and operated by a family, and is predominantly reliant on the family labor of both women and men. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, social and cultural functions.

⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/farming-female-empowerment-agriculture-gender/>

⁵ https://worldbank.github.io/SARMD_guidelines/poverty-measures.html

⁶ <https://www.worldhunger.org/asia-hunger-facts-2018/#:~:text=Southern%20Asia%20has%20the%20highest,of%20the%20hungry%20in%20Asia.>

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).

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. Family farming produce more than 80% of the world's food, and family farmers are custodians of biodiversity and better preserve rural landscapes and well as cultural heritage.

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. Also, the UN Secretary General has called for a Food Systems Summit in 2021. These two global processes, heightened by the covid 19 pandemic, all present tremendous opportunities for South Asia to build back better, harnessing the potentials of its 1Billion farmers to contribute to the immense task of 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.

Thus, 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 support 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 UNDF in South Asia and that will facilitate and accelerate the process of developing national action plans through inclusive multi-stakeholder processes, not only putting family farmers at the center but recognizing them as critical partners. This virtual meeting held on November 5-6, 2020, and attended by 150 participants, 20% women, 20% youth, from all SA countries⁷, from government, family farmers organizations, cooperatives, academia, experts, professionals, civil society, research institutions and intergovernmental organizations .

During this meeting, government officials presented a situation on family farming in their country, as well as on-going and planned efforts to make a national action plan for the UNDF. Firsthand experiences from Family Farmers Organizations from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka in regards to supporting National Family Farmers Committees and multi-stakeholder dialogues were also shared with participants. Break out group discussions were held to identify key priorities in terms of policies, actions and studies/researches that need to be undertaken at the regional level, and which will further support the development and implementation of a Regional Action Plan for UNDF, anchored in the UNDF Global Action Plan.

⁷ Except Afghanistan

As a result of the discussions in the breakout sessions, the participants committed to pursuing the following Priority Policies, Actions, Studies and Researches at national and regional level.

For pillar 1: Develop an Enabling Policy Environment to Strengthen Family Farming

- Gather, harmonize and analyse relevant data, and conduct researches on wider spectrum of Family Farming to inform policymaking, monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Establish an inclusive and effective governance system for policy design and implementation to be focused on access to inputs (for example, improve seeds, fertilizers, irrigation, equipment/mechanization, credits), markets for their products, rural revitalization, and inclusive and sustainable value chain development.
- Reinforce commitment and raising awareness at national and sub-regional level on Family Farming contribution, potential and challenges along with appropriate enabling policies.
- Alignment of existing land and land use policies (e.g. contract farming) with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) and the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI).

For pillar 2: Support youth and ensure the generational sustainability of family farming.

- Increase engagement of youth in family farming and enhance their role in decision-making.
- Strengthen the capacity of young farmers on adopting innovative technologies and practices interconnecting traditional knowledge with new solutions to increase rural employment opportunities through agro-enterprise development and reduce migration from rural to urban and foreign countries.

For Pillar 3: Promote gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of rural women

- Capacity building and sensitization of policy makers to make use of knowledge, policies and information on gender equality and gender sensitive budgeting- ideally to work regionally on a standard on capacity and competency for policy makers and implementers to make sure there are harmonized mechanisms and tools.
- Promoting meaningful participation and leadership of women through capacity development and awareness raising. Ensuring their participation goes beyond numbers for a quota and that an increase in their participation is not contributing to overburdening women.
- Producing and disseminating synthesis documents and research studies that assess women's situation, needs and contributions to family farming – including at the grassroot levels – and translating them into concrete guidelines and policy and program recommendations. Already existing tools should be assessed for gender-based constraints.
- Strengthen women's contributions and promote gender equity across the value chain of the family farming activities.

For Pillar 4: Strengthen family farmers organizations (FFO) and their capacities to generate knowledge, represent farmers concerns and provide inclusive services in rural areas.

- Capacity building and experience sharing for strengthening governance and organizational capacities of FFOs to better serve their members and communities; including giving of awards and incentives to innovative and outstanding Farmers organizations.
- Strengthening FFOs to access and provide farm and non-farm services to their members, implement collective actions and better convey / disseminate / relay the voices of FF through a greater use of ICT.
- Support regional platforms (existing and new ones) to foster experience sharing on inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues, but also relevant technologies for FF, policies and studies (on agricultural cooperatives, diversity of FFO, smart food and healthy diets).
- Follow through the implementation of the provision of farmer representation in the SAARC Seed Bank and approval and implementation of the SAARC Plan of Action for Cooperation on Matters Relating to Cooperatives.

For Pillar 5: Improve socio-economic inclusion, resilience and well-being of family farmers, rural households and communities

- Promote local species of fishes/forests/native crops/local commodities/local technologies/underutilized crops, aligning with the farmers' cooperatives and link with the markets for the products.
- Creation of emergency funds for weather/disaster/pandemic shocks and social safety net and rehabilitation for disadvantaged groups.
- Promote conservation agriculture, urban horticulture, terrace farming, protected agriculture and vertical farming for youth, women and landless labor.
- Prioritize the effective operation of supply chains during pandemic and other disasters.

For Pillar 6: Promote Sustainability of Family Farming for Climate Resilient Food Systems

- Support sustainable and responsible management of natural resources with increased access to productive assets and services to family farmers.
- Promote sustainable agriculture to support current and future generations' needs and mitigate climate change, including sustainable harness of renewable energy.
- Promote inclusive market environment for family farmers.
- Encouraging involvement of women, youth and their organizations in inclusive, sustainable and efficient value chain development.
- Support the development and strengthening of commodity based multi stakeholder platforms including all value chain actors and local level government representatives.

For Pillar 7: Strengthen the multi-dimensionality of family farming to promote social innovations contributing to territorial development and food systems that safeguard biodiversity, environment and culture

- Develop and scale out smallholder-friendly agro ecological and climate resilient technologies.
- Promote nutrition-sensitive as well as gender-sensitive women-farmer friendly agricultural Intensification and diversification.

- Improve access to resources, technologies, and services especially to women and young farmers.
- Develop policies and increase investment in agriculture and rural infrastructure, and cultural heritage of family farmers.
- Develop rural non- farm opportunities for rural youth and women.
- Develop family farm-controlled mechanisms for managing trade-offs between biodiversity, productivity, sustainability of family farmers.
- Strong national, international collaboration, South-South and triangular collaboration in agricultural research and development.

Lastly, the co-organizers of this meeting committed to finalizing and packaging a Regional Action Plan for UNDIFF in South Asia based on the results of this meeting and will be endorsed by SAARC leaders. Within the next two months another multi stakeholder virtual process will be convened to finalize this Plan for endorsement by SAARC leaders.

The participants further committed to operationalize the UNDIFF global action plan at the country level, through the development and implementation of National Action Plans, led by inclusive, multi-stakeholder process (governments, farmers organization, civil society, research organizations, cooperatives and private sector). The regional level will institute mechanisms for the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the UNDIFF plan both at national and regional level.

The participants called on their governments and international development partners to mobilize resources to support the implementation of South Asia's Regional and National Action plans for the UNDIFF. #