

SOUTH ASIA POLICY DIALOGUE

Role of Extension and Advisory Services in Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture

5 October 2018 | Colombo, Sri Lanka



BACKGROUND NOTE

Context

Mounting evidence points to the fact that climate change is already affecting agriculture and food security, which will make the challenge of ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture more difficult¹. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes an explicit link between sustainable development and climate action. Through SDG13, the 2030 Agenda calls for strengthened resilience and adaptive capacity in response to natural hazards and climate-related disasters in all countries. It also calls on all countries to establish and operationalize an integrated strategy – one that includes food security and nutrition – to improve their ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, and to foster climate resilience and lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions without jeopardizing food production².

World Bank³ noted that almost half the South Asian population (eight hundred million South Asians to be exact) are at risk to see their standards of living and incomes decline as rising temperatures and more erratic rainfalls will cut down crop yields, make water more scarce, and push more people away from their homes to seek safer places. Productivity decline leading to food supply shortfalls and increase in food prices would directly affect millions of low-income smallholder farmers, especially those who depend on agriculture for their livelihood and income in South Asia.

¹ FAO 2016. Climate change and food security: risks and responses. Food and Agricultural Organisations of the United Nations, Rome. (available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5188e.pdf>)

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO. (available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i9553EN/i9553en.pdf>)

³ World Bank 2018. South Asia's Hotspots: Impacts of Temperature and Precipitation Changes on Living Standards, World Bank (available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28723>)

Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)

Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) is an approach that integrates climate change into planning and development of sustainable agricultural systems. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines CSA as “agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, enhances resilience (adaptation), reduces/removes GHGs (mitigation) where possible, and enhances achievement of national food security and development goals”⁴. CSA is not a one-size-fits-all set of practices to be adopted by every farmer. In each location, its form needs to be defined by the context (i.e. extent of vulnerability to climate change, varying community risk profiles, availability of resources and livelihood options). It can be applied on a single farm or over entire landscapes, and it often needs involvement of diverse agricultural stakeholders and coordination across different agricultural sectors, as well as other related sectors, such as energy and water. Enhancing the capacity of farmers to manage risk and adopt effective climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies therefore needs special attention. The implementation of CSA innovations calls for the design of appropriate solutions adapted to the technical, institutional and policy related needs of the stakeholders involved.

In principle, CSA may help achieve higher production with reduced emissions. This would have been the simple answer to climate change impacts on agriculture if the issues were simple. But they rarely are. For instance, smallholder farmers of South Asia, who are already facing a plethora of non-climatic stresses, have limited capacity to adopt new technologies. There is a host of barriers—which take the form of limited access to natural resources, information, finance, and above all, human capital—that get in the way of technology adoption. Overcoming these barriers requires institutions and policy support⁵.

Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) for CSA

The implementation of CSA would involve changes in the behaviour, strategies and agricultural practices of millions of farmers worldwide. Farmers need support to understand the impacts of climate change and to adopt CSA practices. Extension and Advisory Services (EAS)⁶ have a crucial role to play in linking farmers with sources of new information and tools so that they can transition to CSA practices⁷ (Simpson and Burpee, 2014). Moreover, there is no category of intermediaries other than EAS that have an explicit focus on supporting such change among rural communities.

⁴ FAO. 2013. Climate Smart Agriculture Source Book, Rome (available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3325e.pdf>)

⁵ Pal B.D, Kishore, A., Joshi, P.K. and Tyagi, N.K (eds.) Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia: Technologies, Policies and Institutions, Springer

⁶ Extension and Advisory Services (also called as Rural Advisory Services) collectively comprise several types of providers from the public, private, NGO and Producer Organisations, known by different names - namely extension agents, community knowledge workers, agronomists, facilitators, advisors, promoters, knowledge intermediaries, programme managers, etc. – and provide a range of services and support to rural communities including technical, organisational, entrepreneurial and managerial support.

⁷ Simpson, B.M., Burpee, C.G. 2014. Adaptation under the “New Normal” of Climate Change: The Future of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services. Michigan State University and Catholic Relief Services. (available https://www.agrilinks.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/MEAS%20Discussion%20Paper%203%20-%20Climate%20Change%20and%20EAS%20-%202014_01_31.pdf)

EAS personnel, especially those working at the field level, have a detailed understanding of the local vulnerability context, as well as of the existence of local support and service networks. Farmers are often more receptive to their advice, as they have long been supporting farmers with information on new and improved technologies and practices. In many countries, EAS personnel have also been supporting the mobilisation of farmers' groups to collectively deal with natural resource management and marketing challenges. While EAS have been contributing significantly to enhancing food security through their advice on improved technologies, they have so far not been very successful in promoting CSA, which demands a strategy that captures the synergies and manages trade-offs among food security, adaptation and mitigation.

Though several pilot projects have shown the relevant roles that EAS could play in promoting CSA, EAS's technical and functional capacities to understand and promote CSA are limited. In this regard, beyond some key weaknesses in capacities at the individual and organizational level (e.g. capacities to anticipate and respond quickly to changes, promoting planned adaptation and mitigation measures, and to continuously reflect and learn from these), there are several institutional and policy bottlenecks in the wider enabling environment that are also constraining EAS in playing a significant role in promoting CSA.

In the context of EAS, the enabling environment includes policies, institutional arrangements, stakeholder involvement, infrastructure and access to knowledge and support from a wide range of other organizations that are critical for their effective functioning, especially in promoting CSA. Promoting adaptation and mitigation measures over entire landscapes, or upscaling CSA at the community and landscape levels, requires coordination across different agricultural sectors, as well as other related sectors, such as forestry, energy, water, finance and insurance.

Coordination is particularly important across national agricultural policies, strategies, investment plans and climate change instruments, including National Adaptation Programmes (NAPs), National Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) and climate change investment plans. There is much that governments can do to bring alignment across policy domains, facilitated by dialogue across relevant ministries, including organizations delivering EAS, to address trade-offs and overlaps. Moreover, success of EAS in the identification, promotion and implementation of appropriate CSA actions at a large scale would essentially depend on coordination among different actors within the public and private sectors. Governments could also enable public private partnerships (PPP) to promote CSA.

EAS also need more research support to select locally relevant practices adapted to a new and more variable climate. It also needs enhanced investments for supporting CSA and new capacities, both technical as well as functional skills related to communication, facilitation and intermediation at multiple levels if it has to promote CSA.

Policy Dialogue

The main objective of this proposed policy dialogue is to engage with policy makers, donors and key extension professionals engaged in promotion of climate smart agriculture in South Asian countries and help them recognize the role EAS can potentially play in scaling up CSA. The dialogue is also expected to serve as a platform for sharing experiences and learning with engaging EAS to scale up CSA; identifying specific challenges persisting in this region for effectively using EAS and; exploring necessary policy changes to address the opportunities and challenges. It is also hoped that the policy dialogue will create a better understanding among key extension managers on accessing climate funds to strengthen capacities of EAS to support scaling up CSA and how the country level networks of EAS providers can support this endeavour. This will also create a forum to explore possibilities for south-south collaboration within and beyond the region for capacity development of EAS professionals.

Programme

The policy dialogue is scheduled as a one day event (5 October 2018) at Colombo. It would be broken down into five sessions starting with the opening session; country presentations: private, NGO and regional actor perspectives; donor perspectives and policy makers perspectives.

The country presentations would focus on the country perspectives related to:

- Promotion of Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) at the country level
- How Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) currently support the 3 dimensions of CSA, namely, enhancing productivity, facilitate adaptation and support mitigation?
- Current challenges in promoting CSA through EAS
- How EAS can better support CSA through development of capacities at different levels?

The private sector, NGOs, regional entities and donors will be elaborating on:

- How are they currently supporting CSA Scaling Up?
- How they see the role of EAS in CSA Scaling Up? And
- What needs to change (funding, priority setting, capacity, infrastructure, nature and extent of collaboration, policy, etc.) in EAS and other actors to fully support CSA Scaling Up?

The policy makers are expected to share their perspectives on the following:

- What policy changes are needed to address the opportunities and challenges EAS has in addressing CSA?
- How to improve collaboration and convergence among line departments and across other actors in public, private and NGO, Producer Organisations to promote CSA?
- How to enhance financing (eg; access to climate funds) for promoting CSA in general and financing EAS to support CSA in particular?
- How to ensure better and more targeted adaptive research support to EAS to fully support CSA Scaling-Up?

Organisers

Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESA) is a regional network for extension stakeholders in South Asia (www.aesa-gfras.net) operating under the wider umbrella of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). CRISP is hosting the secretariat for AESA network. AESA aims at improving food and nutrition security through efficient and effective EAS and sharing, learning and networking for building effective and efficient EAS.

IRRI South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC), Varanasi, India is a regional facility recently established by IRRI (The International Rice Research Institute) that supports research collaboration, training, and service provision to institutions, scientists, and other stakeholders from India and other South Asian and African nations. IRRI's mission is to improve the quality of life of those who depend on the rice sector—from the ultra-poor to those moving up the development ladder—and the environmental sustainability of rice production systems. (www.irri.org).

Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) has been promoting research in the area of innovation policy in relation to agriculture and rural development (www.crispindia.org). It is the implementing partner for the IFAD funded project called Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific-Islands Region through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services (SAAS). Hosting relevant policy dialogues with high-level policy makers to foster change in this region is one of the priorities of this project.

Sri Lanka National Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (NAEASLK) is a recently established country forum of EAS providers in Sri Lanka. It aims to serve as a platform for promoting learning and strengthening capacities among EAS providers in Sri Lanka through networking and policy engagement.