

Agriculture

Smallholders of the 21st century as the primary drivers of sustainable agriculture

A. Rationale

Trends of land consolidation, rural flight, mechanization, and commercialization notwithstanding, smallholders will remain a fixture in Asian nations' economies for the foreseeable future, and certainly well beyond 2030. The challenge, therefore, is to make smallholders part of a sustainable solution rather than part of the problem of unsustainable land management and wasteful food production. Many farming households are currently on the verge of mechanizing their operations and are increasingly vulnerable to becoming fossil fuel dependent and getting trapped in unsustainable pathways. The vast majority of smallholders and small farms are located in Asia's rural areas, and these provide invaluable resources to virtually all other parts of society.

In the discourse on sustainable livelihoods and alternative pathways toward SDG achievement, various models of sustainable smallholder agriculture have emerged following the realization that previous smallholder development has been unsustainable. Taking recent trends such as large-scale labour migration, climate change, urbanization and social discrimination into account, we propose focusing on events that explore the feasibility of sustainable agricultural models and their impacts on rural societies across Asia. The questions answered will center on 'what works' and 'under which conditions', and will additionally focus on developing concrete policy recommendations for sustainable smallholder agricultural development.

B. Important keywords

Smallholders, sustainable agriculture, equitable access to resources, gender, technology, farming methods, environmental rights, social impact.

C. Sub-theme

Focus areas under each them are not expected to cover all aspects of this topic. Targeted events in these areas are suggested. Each selected focus area should relate to the rationale (above).

1) Policy: promoting green and sustainable agriculture throughout the region: A Regional comparison of sustainable agriculture models will yield adapted models as well as identify its benefits for society. Particularly the non-economic value of small farm operations is highlighted when investigating the cultural significance of agriculture. In addition, new challenges emerge, such as planning for climate adaptation in smallholder farming systems. This sub-theme aims to develop an inclusive agricultural and rural development policy and unleash the potential for gender and youth.

2) Models for sustainable agriculture: Determining the regional potential for organic agriculture and other sustainable forms of agriculture, together with value-added approaches, such as geo-indexing combined with sustainable production and an emphasis on ecosystem services, such as agro-biodiversity and multi-functional landscapes.

3) Responsible and sustainable value chains: New structural arrangements can be explored here, such as the challenges and potential for contract farming in the region. Modern technologies, such as applying blockchain technologies for sustainable value chains can be put to the fore, as well as new financial structures of agri-SME finance for smallholder farmers

4) Sustainable intensification: Increasing efficiency in small farms is one of the largest challenges in the region. However, how to do this while avoiding further dependency on fossil fuels? New approaches point to the electrification of farm machinery, closing energy cycles on farms and various new models for green extension