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

CUTS International was part of the ‘Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio in South Asia’ programme from 2013-2016 funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian Government, to address food, water, and energy security in South Asia. In this intervention, CUTS undertook extensive research and advocacy based on grassroots evidences in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan across the river basins of Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra. This document aims to provide the prospective pathways to change for these South Asian countries.
**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promote sustainable agricultural practices</th>
<th>Foster regional agricultural value chains</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identification of sustainable agricultural practices, sharing the knowledge and facilitating scale up</td>
<td>• Strengthening linkages between service providers, market players and farmers through collaborative structures</td>
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<td>• Reorienting agricultural incentives to promote resource efficient agricultural technologies and sustainable practices</td>
<td>• Developing market infrastructure through better regulatory framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Engaging with community leaders and CSOs at local and subnational level in policy planning</td>
<td>• Enhanced operations at border trade points for increased formal cross-border agricultural input-output trade and improvement in local economy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Harmonization of laws and regulations and reducing non-tariff barriers</td>
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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. 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.

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

2 Details of the discussions at the engagement platform can be accessed at: [http://www.cuts-citee.org/SDIP/Advocacy.htm](http://www.cuts-citee.org/SDIP/Advocacy.htm)
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-regional</td>
<td>6. Policy dialogue on fostering agricultural value chains in eastern South Asia at Guwahati</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>7. Engaging periodically at District Agricultural Development Forum (DADF) in Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>8. Advocacy event on sustainable agriculture in changing climate scenario at Lucknow</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>9. Advocacy workshop on fertilizer policy of India at Lucknow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>10. Consultation on Farmer Producers Organisation (FPOs) at Patna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>11. Consultation on agricultural value chain and market linkages in Bihar and West Bengal at Patna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>12. One to one advocacy meetings held with six state level officials in agriculture and marketing department in Assam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>13. Dissemination meeting on sustainable agricultural practices at Guwahati</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-regional</td>
<td>14. Legislative engagement with India and Pakistan stakeholders for the promotion of agriculture at Chandigarh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>15. Advocacy event on agriculture in Punjab and status of small and marginal farmers at Chandigarh</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>16. Regional Dialogue on exploring trans-boundary cooperation in agriculture, water and energy</td>
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**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.
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.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Prospective Pathways</th>
<th>Targeted Change makers</th>
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</table>
| Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan   | **1. Identify sustainable agricultural practices, share knowledge, and facilitate scale-up of practices**<br>  
  - 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                                        | **2. Review the current input subsidy regime for reorienting agricultural incentives to promote resource efficient agricultural technologies and sustainable practices**<br>  
  - 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   | **3. Facilitate engagement between governments, communities, CSOs and the media**<br>  
  - 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 |
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| Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan | **4. Strengthen linkages between service providers, market players and farmers through collaborative structures**  
- 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 | **5. Capacity building and skills development of farmers to transform conventional agriculture to agribusiness models**  
- 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 | **6. Promote better regulatory framework for market infrastructure**  
- 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 *Haats* 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

**Instruments**
- Research papers
- Diagnostic study
- Reports
- Mapping (Policy, CSO, Media)
- Stakeholder consultations
- Perception Survey

**Observations**
- Resource scarcity
- Imbalance in nutrition
- Lack of information and poor access to technologies
- Lack of policy supporting value chains
- Lack of private investment in infrastructure
- Poor value chain linkages and access to markets

**Insights from Engagement Platform**
- Need stress tolerant varieties
- Cheaper nitrogenous fertilizers
- Greater in-state and cross-border cooperation
- Greater inclusion of farmers, CSOs, media in governance
- Improve market connectivity and infrastructure
- Non-tariff barriers
- Harmonise standards and reduce NTBs

**Prospective Pathways**
- Identify, share, and scale-up sustainable practices
- Review input subsidy regimes
- Facilitate engagement between stakeholders
- Strengthen collaborative structures
- Capacity building on agribusiness
- Promote better regulatory framework for market infrastructure and private investment
- Promote water resource management for irrigation

**Targeted Change**
- Increased awareness among farmers about benefits of sustainable practices create a demand for greater investment
- Policy makers start discussions on reorienting incentives and subsidies
- Stakeholders are more aware of constraints and gaps in existing policy framework of FPOs
- Create a discourse towards enabling more public-private dialogues on market infrastructure
- Facilitate policy dialogues on MRAs and higher trans-boundary cooperation. Reduce NTBs

**Assumptions and Risks**
- Partner NGOs are interested in sharing sustainable agricultural practices in their state/country
- Politicians/policymakers are interested in increasing private participation
- Political economy of neighbouring countries (Nepal, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh) is favourable for trade facilitation and CSO to raise their voice
- Civil Society has networks to work towards market reforms and improving extension services

**Impact**
Sustained increases in agricultural productivity and farm incomes for the poor, women, vulnerable