



Connecting the dots to transform food systems in South Asia: TAFSSA's engagement strategy

Practice Note 1

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INTRODUCTION

Home to one-quarter of humanity — one-fifth of whom are youth — South Asia has the world's largest concentration of poverty and malnutrition. The Green Revolution positioned South Asia to produce one-quarter of the world's consumed food, but the region's agrifood systems today face formidable poverty reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation, environmental health and biodiversity challenges. Significant hurdles remain to securing an adequate and affordable supply of diverse foods necessary for sustainable healthy diets (SHDs). Social, economic, and geographic inequalities create barriers from production to consumption, disproportionately affecting the poor. Unhealthy food consumption is rising, with many nutritious foods too costly for the poor.

Working across South Asia, Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia (TAFSSA), is delivering a coordinated program of research and engagement across the food production-to-consumption continuum to improve equitable access to sustainable healthy diets, improve farmer livelihoods and resilience, and conserve land, air, and groundwater resources.

One of the key objectives of TAFSSA is to develop inclusive learning platforms, public data systems and partnerships to improve the evidence base, increase data quality and accessibility, and develop integrated datasets for agrifood systems transformation.

To support inclusive learning and evidence-informed transformative actions across the production-consumption continuum, TAFSSA will unfold a multi-stakeholder engagement strategy. This strategy aims to strengthen the evidence base for action on agrifood systems in South Asia by bringing diverse stakeholders together and actively facilitating dialogue, evidence-building, learning and consensus building. These actions are intended to move knowledge into practice across the South Asia region.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

A multi-stakeholder process (MSP) aims to support participatory decision-making and information sharing at different geographic levels. Key stakeholders should be represented and decide what issues to focus on and what actions to take. MSPs range from simple processes, such as one-off or routine consultations, to more complex ones such as multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships.

The potential benefits of multi-stakeholder processes are as follows:

- **Relevance:** Local stakeholders best understand which activities are truly relevant to their needs and realistic in a specific context.
- **Ownership and sustainability:** Local stakeholders share information and jointly decide what actions to take. This leads to greater local ownership of activities and outcomes – which makes them more sustainable.
- **Builds partnerships and alliances:** Having a common goal strengthens partnerships and creates opportunities for dialogue and sharing resources.

TAFSSA's multi-stakeholder engagement strategy will draw upon the benefits mentioned above of a multi-stakeholder process, and base its structure and activities on the following principles:

- **Geographic diversity:** Involving stakeholders across the four TAFSSA countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan) on focus topical areas.
- **Disciplinary diversity:** Involving stakeholders from different disciplines within and across countries on focused topical areas.
- **Professional diversity:** Involving stakeholders from diverse professional backgrounds like research, government, civil society, industry, media and more.
- **Guarding against conflict of interest:** In engaging in any dialogue with stakeholders, we will take great care to respect conflict-of-interest issues.

KEY GOALS FOR THE TAFSSA ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Grounded in the principles of a multi-stakeholder process and TAFSSA's engagement principles, following are the key objectives of TAFSSA multi-stakeholder engagement strategy:

- Develop multiscale learning platforms and/or processes to effectively support, engage, and connect existing but siloed knowledge networks to accelerate the diffusion of data and evidence informing agrifood systems.
- Engage stakeholders around the key issues of agrifood systems at regional level and of regional relevance.
- Identify mechanisms to sustain learning platforms beyond the initiative timeline.

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

TAFSSA will deploy multiple approaches to engage stakeholders across the region on food systems issues: knowledge partnerships, knowledge products, events and virtual knowledge platforms.

- TAFSSA is conducting stakeholder mapping exercise across the four countries to identify relevant stakeholders and form **knowledge partnerships**. In addition to this, TAFSSA will engage with country specific technical partners and regional **knowledge networks** like SAPLING, NINSA and CSISA (Box 1).
- TAFSSA is producing timely and accessible **knowledge products** (research notes, policy notes, data notes, practice notes, research reports, event reports, etc.) in printed and digital versions to disseminate widely through several fora and knowledge networks. Research studies will also be published in high impact relevant journals. Where possible and considered appropriate, knowledge products will be translated into local languages to reach stakeholders at the local level. In addition, TAFSSA will also produce routine updates to keep stakeholders updated on progress.

Box 1: Examples of regional multi-stakeholder platforms for nutrition in South Asia

South Asian Policy Leadership for Nutrition and Growth (SAPLING), is a regional platform that aims to build consensus in realigning the food system for delivery of accessible, affordable and healthy diets across South Asia. It was previously anchored by BRAC (Bangladesh) and is being reviewed and updated for a next phase.

Network for Improved Nutrition in South Asia (NINSA), hosted by UNICEF, South Asia, aims to harness the collective support of regional development partners to assist SAARC member states to improve the nutritional status of women and children in South Asia.

Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA), works in synergy with regional and national efforts, collaborating with myriad public, civil society and private-sector partners to increase the adoption of various resource-conserving and climate-resilient technologies and improve farmers' access to market information and enterprise development.

- We will conduct **workshops/events/conferences** in focus countries and/or at regional level and facilitate consultations with policy makers and policy shapers to support the use of food systems evidence for decision-making and actions.
- Last, but not least, TAFSSA will invest in **knowledge sharing through virtual platforms** like social media, blogs, and email. TAFSSA's microsite will act as a repository for all the generated evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

TAFSSA aims to use a diverse suite of approaches strategically to support knowledge communities across South Asia in connecting the dots between evidence, policy and practices. We welcome partnership in this area.



TAFSSA launch events in Nepal, India and Bangladesh in 2022. Photo credit: TAFSSA

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ABOUT TAFSSA

TAFSSA (*Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia*) is a CGIAR Regional Integrated Initiative to support actions that improve equitable access to sustainable healthy diets, improve farmers' livelihoods and resilience, and conserve land, air, and water resources in South Asia.

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