

Ensuring Inclusiveness, Sustainability, and Efficiency of Food System Transformation in the ASEAN and BIMSTEC countries “ATMI-II”

1. BACKGROUND

The project “Ensuring Inclusiveness, Sustainability, and Efficiency of Food System Transformation in the ASEAN and BIMSTEC Countries - (ATMI-II)” responds to the rapid transformation of agri-food systems across selected Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) member states. These countries face significant development challenges, including persistent rural poverty, inequality across socio-economic groups, and high vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. As agricultural markets become more integrated regionally and globally, concerns have intensified regarding inclusiveness, particularly the participation of smallholder farmers, women, and youth in value chains, markets, and policy processes.

Building on the achievements of [ATMI-I](#), ATMI-II expands both its geographic and thematic scope to include countries from both ASEAN and BIMSTEC, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Project adopts a regional and policy-oriented approach, working directly with governments and the ASEAN and BIMSTEC Secretariats to strengthen institutional capacity, promote evidence-based policymaking,



and foster cross-country learning. The project is the first platform to bring ASEAN and BIMSTEC together under a single structured policy dialogue, anchored through the Network of Policy Advisors and Analysts (NePAA) - a cross-regional network that translates research into actionable policy outcomes.

2. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

ATMI-II builds on the strong foundation and lessons of its first phase, which delivered significant results in country-level and regional policy engagement across ASEAN. This second phase broadens that ambition by expanding the scope, deepening the analysis, and bringing BIMSTEC countries into a shared regional policy agenda.

Goal: Strengthen the institutional capacity of selected ASEAN and BIMSTEC countries to develop and implement policies and sub-regional programmes in support of the integration of smallholders into sub-regional agricultural and food markets.

This goal will focus on the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Strengthening the capacity of the targeted countries to develop policies and programmes to support the adjustment of smallholder farming in transforming food systems.
- **Objective 2:** Embedding environment and climate considerations in policy decisions while promoting cooperation among the selected member states.
- **Objective 3:** Scoping out the possible effects of new and expanding market integration arrangements for the agri-food sectors.

3. ABOUT NePAA

The NePAA was initiated under the "Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration Phase I", an IFAD-funded project to foster sustained dissemination and uptake of research, capacity strengthening, and policy dialogue. Led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), NePAA serves as a unique platform bringing together key stakeholders such as regional bodies, policymakers, academicians, farmer's associations, and research professionals. It aims to facilitate collaboration, mobilize collective strengths, and provide evidence-based policy recommendations to the ASEAN and BIMSTEC, particularly advocating pro-smallholder agri-food system policies. NePAA will actively support capacity building, empirical policy analysis, and continuous knowledge exchange among ASEAN and BIMSTEC member states.

NePAA research, policy and capacity activities operate through two Thematic Working Groups (TWGs):

- **TWG 1 - Agricultural Transformation:** Examines how agri-food systems are evolving beyond traditional farming, with value increasingly generated off-farm through processing, logistics, and retail. The group focuses on value chain transformation, with emphasis on midstream and downstream segments such as agro-processing and integrated production-marketing hubs. It also looks at how transformation can be made inclusive for women, youth, and marginalized groups, and how it can embed climate resilience for long-term sustainability.
- **TWG 2 - Trade and Market Integration:** Examines how countries can strengthen their participation in regional and global value chains, with a focus on shifting from raw commodity exports toward processed and higher-value products. The group analyses key barriers to competitiveness including domestic trade costs and harmonization of standards. It also looks at how trade policy can be better aligned with agricultural transformation to capture greater value domestically, ensuring benefits reach smallholders and vulnerable communities.

4. PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Component 1: Consolidate and build capacity of the Network of Policy Advisors and Analysts (“NePAA”) created under ATMI-I. To consolidate NePAA through building the analytical capabilities within relevant national-level entities dealing with agriculture and rural development in pursuit of integrated and collective policy responses to the regional issues constraining food systems transformation. We shall achieve this through targeted and demand driven capacity development in the focus countries and regional bodies. The primary activities to be undertaken under this component will be:

- assisting the governments in understanding the facets of food system transformation in the region; and
- understanding and applying systems-thinking through an integrated approach where economic (e.g. market integration), climatic, and inclusiveness aspects are considered and analyzed together.

Component 2: Collaborative Policy Studies on Food System Transformation. The agricultural value chains in ASEAN and BIMSTEC countries are rapidly changing, with serious implications for equity, efficiency, and inclusiveness. The policy analysis will primarily focus on those emerging issues and identify chains that combine the effects on economy, environment and inclusiveness. We shall conduct scoping studies for identifying the regional and domestic chains from these three perspectives. Under this component, we shall focus on:



- analyzing food system transformation, specifically agricultural value chains transformation (incorporating off-farm dynamics) focusing on smallholders’ competitiveness, women’s empowerment, and effects on the green economy;
- reviewing regional and supra-regional cooperation including inputs, technology and institutional initiatives;
- reviewing national and regional strategies, policies, and institutions that respond to food system transformation amid evolving economic partnership arrangements;
- analyzing the decision-making processes related to policies, as many other factors influence their formulation and adoption (e.g. incentives from society for change of policies; bureaucratic processes to adopt and implement a policy); and
- providing technical assistance to governments in formulating policies and regulations, conducting related investment analysis, and evaluating programs and tracking progress.

Component 3: Communications and outreach. To ensure effective communications and outreach under this component through its agreements and the ongoing engagements with BIMSTEC, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and ASEAN to support effective policy communication and sustainable scaling up of the NePAA. We shall utilize its capacity to generate high-quality evidence in food and agricultural policy space through a range of networks, and its strong presence through its country programmes and ongoing projects in many countries. It will be supported by:

- the quality of the evidence that would be generated through in-depth and demand driven research on different facets of food system transformation; and
- the strength of the NePAA network that will serve as a unique platform to bring together key stakeholders, foster collaboration, and mobilize collective strengths to provide evidence-based policy options and recommendations to both the ASEAN and BIMSTEC Secretariat and other regional stakeholders, especially on pro-smallholders agri food systems.

5. FOCUS COUNTRIES AND PLANNED WORK

All ASEAN and BIMSTEC member states, with a focus on seven countries - namely Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. IFPRI, in collaboration with its partners, will finalize the NePAA design and structure; develop the analytical framework for food systems transformation and trade and market integration; create a data repository; and organize NePAA webinars and capacity-strengthening programs. Country-specific work includes:

Bangladesh	Trade cost/time estimation (using OSRM); GVC participation analysis using TiVA database; Household food enterprise participation (BIHS panel data)
India	Trade cost/time estimation (using OSRM); GVC participation analysis using TiVA database; Food system transformation analysis (using enterprise survey data)
Nepal	Trade cost/time estimation (using OSRM); analysis of agri-food enterprise dynamics in agriculture transformation (using NLSS)
Bhutan	Situation analysis for trade facilitation constraints; positioning of high-value organic agri-products
Philippines	Trade cost estimation (using OSRM); GVC participation (using TiVA database); Situation analysis for food systems transformation
Viet Nam	GVC participation analysis (using TiVA database); Situation analysis linking food systems transformation to policy priorities
Thailand	GVC participation analysis (using TiVA); Situation analysis for food systems transformation

6. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- greater engagement/competitiveness of smallholders (women and youth) and empowerment of women in transforming food systems in the focus countries;
- better understanding of common opportunities and challenges for inclusive and sustainable food systems transformation at the regional and country level through better informed policy process;

- reduced exposure to shocks from climate and economic-political factors through regional value chains; and
- increased regional level engagement among policymakers, private firms, farmer organization and researchers, fostering a deeper understanding of interlinkages and spillovers effects.

Additionally, the Project will aim to ensure the sustainability of a network for collaborative research, capacity strengthening and policy engagement that has been operational since the first phase with an expanded scope that considers climate change, gender, and youth.

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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia

The ATMI-II Project Microsite

<https://www.ifpri.org/project/ensuring-inclusiveness-sustainability-and-efficiency-of-food-system-transformation-in-the-asean-and-bimstec-countries/>

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