

Concept Note
Regional TCP on Zero Hunger Challenge
Creating Enabling Environments for Nutrition-sensitive Food and Agriculture to
Address Malnutrition

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1.1. Relevance: Problems to be addressed

1. Reducing malnutrition is a major challenge in Asia, especially where low-income small-scale households in developing countries are concerned. Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal and Cambodia are countries with a high stunting rate among children – and it is well known that this has long-term negative implications for economic development.
2. The governments of Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal and Cambodia have made strong commitments on Zero Hunger, and have formulated a series of national strategies and policies on agriculture and health policies. However, due to the intrinsic crosscutting nature of malnutrition and of its root cause, and co-existence of sector and sub-sector strategies from a food system perspective, it remains unclear regarding whether policy along the value chain are coordinated and conducive to nutrition-sensitive food and agriculture.
3. Starting from a food system perspective, a number of questions can be asked to identify the root causes of malnutrition. What are the main food consumption patterns and dietary patterns in the selected countries? What are the cropping characteristics? How can high prevalence of malnutrition be addressed through nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions? What is the local potential to tap so as to promote various agriculture sectors for nutrition-sensitive agriculture? What kind of enabling environment is required for promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture? What are the impediments to consuming nutritious food (consumption side), and what are the impediments to producing more nutritious food (food supply side)?
4. Dietary diversity and production diversity are recognized factors in strategies to improve nutrition and health. However, there are only few studies available on the correlation between malnutrition, dietary diversity and production diversity in specific countries and assessing the associated nutritional impact of agricultural policies. Also, there is only limited empirical evidence on the role played by production diversification in nutrition improvement. Moreover, there are only few scientific results analysing the nutrient content of underutilized crops and how to promote them for dietary diversification.
5. Currently, agriculture has an over-reliance on a handful of major staple crops, which poses an inherent nutritional, agronomic, ecological and economic risks. Globally, only three crops—wheat, rice and maize—covered 555 million ha or 40% of all arable land globally in 2011, delivering more than 50% of the world's consumption of calories and protein. About 95% of the world's food needs are provided by just 30 species of plants, while at least 12,650 known plant species are considered edible. In Asia, rice continues to be the dominant food staple.
6. Agrobiodiversity are fundamental resources for agricultural diversification. Underutilized crops (sometimes called “neglected”, “underexploited”, “minor”, “orphan”, “promising”

and "little-used") are an essential component of agrobiodiversity. Historically, underutilized crops have often been used for food and other uses on a large scale, and in some countries are still very common especially with small or marginal farmers. They have multiple values: their nutritional value is high, and they are often an essential source of vitamins, micronutrients and protein and thus help to attain nutritional security, for example, pulse. As vegetables, they can have considerable commercial value and therefore contribute to increasing household income. Because they are frequently adapted to marginal conditions, underutilized crops can make production systems more sustainable and climate-resilient. Wider use of today's underutilized minor crops provide therefore provides opportunity to diversify into nutrition-rich crop production systems, thereby enhancing resilience to both biotic and abiotic stress.

7. Underutilized crops and wild food plants are abundant in most Asian countries, especially Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal and Cambodia. However, their potential nutritional and market value, as well as their suitability for climate-adaptation are underexploited. Significant research and policy analysis required to create enabling environment to materialize the promising potentials on nutrition, climate adaptation, as well as commercialization. Given FAO's existing knowledge on the food system approach and the importance of underutilized crops, it implies a huge potential that RAP can tap and make unique contribution.
8. This project intends to focus on creating an enabling environment for dietary and production diversification from a food system perspective, using agrobiodiversity as example. Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal and Cambodia are considered as selected countries under the project.

1.2. About the Project

9. Objective of the Project:

The project aims at reviewing national policy framework and fostering enabling policy environment for production diversification and dietary diversity, especially tapping the potential of highly nutritious and climate-sensitive underutilized crops to address malnutrition in selected countries.

10. Impact:

Better enabling environment to promote dietary and production diversity to address hunger and malnutrition at national level.

11. Outcome:

Relevant government, within and beyond Ministries of Agriculture, have improved crop sector policies, which allow countries to tap potentials of agrobiodiversity to address malnutrition towards enhancing livelihoods, improving nutrition and generating income and promoting equitable economic growth.

12. Expected outputs and activities:

The expected outputs are:

- a. National policy and strategy recommendations on multi-dimensional enabling environment for nutrition-sensitive food and agriculture from a food system perspective be developed;
- b. Evidence-based study on crop diversity, dietary diversity and nutrition analysis in selected countries be conducted.

- c. Regional policy advice based on lessons learnt from the country studies be provided.

To achieve the above-mentioned outputs, the following activities are proposed under each output.

1. Map and review national food security and nutrition strategies, policies, regulations, institutions that affect crop sector (staple and underutilized crops) from a food system perspective
 - a. Map existing policies, regulations and institutions that cover underutilized crops from a food system perspective (i.e. not a cash crop);
 - b. Review policies, regulations and institutions affecting underutilized crops, identifying critical policy issues and technical gaps that may exist in relation to supporting production and dietary diversity;
 - c. Develop specific recommendations to address the policy and programmatic gaps which will foster the diversification of crops and diets that tap the potential of underutilized crops (based on activities listed under item 2 below);
 - d. Organize national multi-stakeholders policy dialogues on challenges and options promoting pathways out of malnutrition, with a focus on underutilized crops, and assist governments in adopting new/revised policy frameworks.
2. Conduct evidence-based study on aspects of crop diversity related to dietary diversity and malnutrition in selected countries:
 - a. Conduct targeted analysis on malnutrition, crop diversity and dietary/food consumption analyses in the target geographic area and populations according to the incidence and prevalence of malnutrition, identifying key features and main challenges;
 - b. Identify 1-2 selected underutilized crop(s) that have a known high nutritious value and with a tradition for consumption at least at some level in the target areas, and with potential for expanding their role in the diet;
 - c. Conduct value chain analysis, through field survey and interviewing relevant stakeholders including farmers, for the selected underutilized crop to identify policy, regulatory and institutional constraints and potential for production, consumption and market development;
 - d. Conduct technical analysis on the productivity gaps and potential for selected underutilized crop(s) from field to market.
3. Provide regional policy recommendation based on lessons learnt from the country studies for the Asia and Pacific countries
 - a. Provide a synthesis report based on lessons learnt from the country studies.
 - b. Knowledge sharing of national studies at regional level.