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Pathways for Enhancing Farmers' Income, Nutritional Security and Sustainable Food Systems

Thematic Session: TRANSFORMING INDIAN AGRICULTURE

Discussion Paper: Transforming Indian Agriculture

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Abstract: Agriculture is an important sector of the Indian economy. Covering 11.24 percent of the world's arable land area and 4 percent of the world's renewable water resources, India produces sufficient food, feed and fibre to sustain about 18 percent (1.38 billion) of the world's population (as of 2020). Over the last few decades (1980/81-2019/20), the sector has registered an average annual growth of 3.2 percent – almost double the population growth of 1.7 percent per annum during the same period. As a result, it has turned India from a food deficit country to one with a net trade surplus of 3.7 percent of agri-gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018-19. Agriculture contributes about 16.5 percent to the country's overall GDP, and employs nearly 42.3 percent of the country's workforce (2019/-20), with an average holding size of just 1.08 hectares (2015/16). This paper dwells on how Indian agriculture has structurally transformed over the long run and the role of technologies, investments, institutions and policies in this transformation. In light of this, a moot question addressed in this paper is: Can India remain a food surplus nation by 2030, especially in the wake of emerging challenges such as sustainability, climate change, urbanisation, etc.? The paper ends on a positive note, articulating that with emerging innovations across food value chains, India can remain largely self-reliant in food. There is the possibility of some net surpluses. India can graduate to more nutritious diets, provided agriculture policy is not only crop-neutral but also neutral between consumers and producers.

Keywords: agriculture, transformation, diversification, intensification, institutions

The full text of the paper is available on the NITI Aayog website or you may contact FAO at fao-in@fao.org for a soft copy. Your feedback is welcome; you may send your comments on the discussion paper to FAO at the above email id.