Session Notes

Session: Building Resilience to Nutrition Insecurity and Weather Shocks in South Asia
Chair: PURVI MEHTA-BHATT, Regional Representative, South Asia, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), India
Panelists: RAJENDRA ADHIKARI, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Agricultural Development, Nepal
MUBARIK ALI, Senior Research Fellow, Innovative Development Strategies (IDS), Pakistan
S. MAHENDRA DEV, Director, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, India
FAHMIDA KHATUN, Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh
D. B. T. WIJERATNE, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Sri Lanka
Rapporteur: ZHENYA KARELINA, Freelance Consultant, USA

OVERVIEW
Regional experts from South Asia representing 5 different countries (Nepal, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) framed the session with a discussion about the key priority areas for building resilience to nutrition insecurity and weather shocks. Session chair Purvi Mehta-Bhatt in her opening remarks emphasized the importance of recognizing the large diversity (i.e. ecological, demographic, social) and scale of this region when addressing resilience challenges. The second half of session focused on approaches for building resilience; here, several key themes emerged:

- Improving weather forecasting and the dissemination of this information is needed.
- Promoting a human-centered, systems approach to policy and program development. Sharing these best practices with other regions like Sub-Saharan Africa is also important.
- Strengthening the political commitment to better regional trade and cooperation while balancing national self-reliance is imperative. Currently, very little trade occurs within South Asia.
- Consolidating players from public and private sectors will help to improve efficiency and increase impact. As Chair Mehta-Bhatt concluded in her remarks: “There needs to be a ministry of ‘follow-up’ just to manage all of the agencies involved.”

APPROACHES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE

Rajendra Akhikari (Nepal)
- Change the approach to the ways things are currently being done in the following areas:
  - Community development (building strong institutions on the government level, productive, led by youth)
  - Partnerships (Greater representation of farmers in all spheres)
  - Policy (Need for incentives to get policymakers involved in food/nutrition interventions)
- The food and nutrition ministry is now together (previously agriculture and health were separate), but there is still an issue of duplication of resources and mismanagement
Mubarak Ali (Pakistan)

- Need for a proactive versus reactive approach to building resilience through:
  - Regional and internal price forecasting mechanisms
  - Weather forecasting mechanisms
  - Greater country and community leadership for poverty alleviation (moving away from donor-driven leadership)
  - Sustainable programs and policies outside of food subsidies to protect the poor
  - Small/ Medium enterprise programs that provide loans and training to particular populations, such as women

S. Mahendra Dev (India)

- Social protection programs that focus on linking agriculture and women
- Climate smart technologies, including rain water conservation
- Capacity building for key stakeholders
- Weather protection including forecasting and insurance
- Greater cooperation across the region, particularly for water and energy management
- Strengthening the connection between agriculture and nutrition through research, value chain approaches (from productivity to marketing), better sanitation/drinking water

D.B.T. Wijeratne (Sri Lanka)

- Improving resilience in agriculture and cultivation:
  - Systems for predicting weather changes as well as water availability
  - Policies and regulations to promote diversification
  - Tools for extracting ground water
  - Storage for seeds
- Making agricultural technology attractive to the population through loans, training, certification
- Creating awareness and collaboration across all levels of government

Fahmida Khatun

- Enhancing support for people working in unofficial jobs: social safety programs, rural maintenance, CCTs, school feeding programs
- Improving accountability: While the government has started a large resilience fund, there are limitations in efficiency and effectiveness of how the money is used.
- Reducing malnutrition: Undernourishment is still extremely high (68%). While these numbers have declined, they remain very high. This trend poses a threat for economic growth because there is a lack of human capital
- Increasing scale to improve access to technologies: Right now there are a lot of players, particularly NGOs, to manage. The government needs to be more involved to bring it up to scale.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Weather-Forecasting: Any significant progress made in the region about sharing data about weather? How much access do the communities have to these systems? How can it be disseminated?

Regional Trade: Any progress towards cross-country trade?
  - South Asia is the region that is least integrated. Only 5% of trade is held between South Asian countries. This is not a tariff issue. The border issues are preventing trade. There is no political will or commitment

Food Price Shocks: What did we learn from the 2008 shocks about what the countries can do? What examples in South Asia can be applied to Africa?

Climate Change: Agriculture is a climate sensitive area and there are limits to what we can do. What mitigation strategies are there? What can be done to increase the commitment to climate change?
We need to build a ‘systems’ resilience, not an individual one. In India, there are 8 national missions about climate change. There is a need for greater dialogue across all regions.

**Move to High-Value/ High Nutrition Agriculture:** How can we leverage this movement for better nutrition? This year is called the year of the family farms. How can we re-emphasize family farms that would lead to better, more sustainable nutrition strategy?

*This note was prepared by the session rapporteur.*