



Institutions to support intensification, integrated decision making and inclusiveness in agriculture in the Eastern Gangetic Plains

Overview

The future prosperity of the massive population of the Eastern Gangetic Plains (EGP) is at a crossroads. Rural poverty is endemic across the region and food insecurity common. Resources for agriculture are relatively abundant, compared to neighbouring regions, and research from ACIAR and others has demonstrated the potential benefits from intensifying agricultural production.

Intensification and the expansion of conservation agriculture-based sustainable intensification (CASI) in the EGP has also been given a high priority by the Governments of India, Nepal and Bangladesh and significant investments have been directed at this goal. In the Australian case, this has been part of the Sustainable and Resilient Farming Systems Intensification (SRFSI) project supported by ACIAR, which sits within the wider Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio (SDIP) supported by the Australian government. SDIP has a strong emphasis on integrated decision making – specifically the integrated management of water, energy and food across the EGP.

Agricultural intensification, (e.g. in the form of CASI), can be consistent with successful integrated decision making (as sought in SDIP), but this is not always the case. Aligning localised choices with a wider set of activities requires information and incentives to foster successful integration. A critical question is how institutions in their various forms and scales can simultaneously and successfully promote the “3 I’s” of intensification, integration and inclusiveness in the EGP.

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| ACIAR project number | Phase 1 Proposal (currently under review) |
| Start date and duration (years) | June 2018 (2 years) |
| Location | Bangladesh, India, Nepal |
| Budget | AU \$1,298,934 |

Project leader(s) and Commissioned Organisation

Professor Lin Crase, University of South Australia

Partner country project leaders and their institutions

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A unique opportunity exists now to build on the foundation work on CASI and SRSFI to answer these types of questions. Whilst there is ample policy documentation at national and state levels dealing with agricultural reforms, implementation is highly variable across the region and the performance of institutions that sit between policy proclamations and farmers has not been consistently measured. This creates a novel opportunity to empirically identify the character of successful institutions and guide future roll-out of new or modified programs.



Research

The overall aim of this project is to develop capacity within district, state and national agencies in the EGP to identify and consistently promote institutions that foster the “3 I’s” of intensification, integration and inclusiveness in the EGP.

The project has three main objectives:

1. To create an understanding within agencies of the existing institutions that influence farm-level choices across local and district scales against specific national objectives
2. To empirically evaluate the performance of different institutional designs across three domains, using economic efficiency, equity and environmental sustainability as yardsticks
3. To foster collaboration with and within state, district and national authorities by developing an agreed evidence-based framework for shaping institutions that promotes the “3 I’s”.

Anticipated outcomes

The outcomes from the project will be additional capacity within district, state and national agencies for designing institutions that go beyond encouraging intensification of agriculture at a particular location. Rather, the institutions chosen and promoted by agencies will relate local choices to the wider trade-offs around resource use in the region and seek to optimize across those trade-offs. The users of the ultimate output (i.e. the 3 I’s Framework) will be policy makers and leaders within implementation agencies.

By having agencies select better performing institutions:

- » Farmers will receive clearer signals about profitable and sustainable agriculture;
- » water resources will be used in ways that give account to its value and sustainable use across the region; and
- » farmers will employ strategies that reduce vulnerability to market and climate risks.

The attention to inclusiveness as part of all three objectives will specifically benefit marginalized groups, such as women and girls in agriculture. Knowledge transfer approaches will be used that are sensitive to the needs of this cohort; there will be improved understanding of how water institutions can be changed to make them more amenable to the needs of women; and risk management approaches will take account of the distinctive requirements of women and girls.

Impact pathway

From the outset, engagement with key personnel involved in policy development and implementation will be a hallmark. Once mapping is done, where agencies are intimately involved, the complexity of the institutional landscape should be overt. This will provide a basis for discussing the net benefits of working in silos versus integration.

The empirical evidence assembled through the different studies of the three domains is anticipated to help progress this dialogue and be impactful and useful to governments in its own right. For example, agencies will have the opportunity, through the mapping exercise, to identify specific empirical gaps that need filling and this will be taken up as part of meeting objective 2. The translation of the empirical evidence into guidelines and then a 3I’s Framework will form an additional pathway to action.

