



## ***Supporting Policy Research to Inform Agricultural Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia***

***Supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation***

***Regional Workshop: Colombo, 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2012***

***In partnership with the Institute of the Policy Studies of Sri Lanka***

### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **South Asian researchers say women farmers should be a priority for food security**

**Press Conference: 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 | Time: 11:15 am - 12:30 pm**

**Venue: Jubilee Room, Galle Face Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Empowering women to be confident farmers should be a priority of South Asian countries, according to a GDN Policy Brief on addressing challenges to food security and rural livelihoods in South Asia; launched today.

Empowered women farmers can increase their income and develop a stable rural livelihood, the policy brief recommended. The brief highlighted an example from Kerala, a state in South India, where 250,000 women farm 10 million acres of land. In Kerala, the Sangha Krishi experiment shows that if women are supported with land ownership schemes and index-based insurance to become independent food producers, then they can play a significant role in combating food security.

Pooja, a farmer from the Sanga Krishi initiative says "Now that we work in a group we at least earn 70,000 rupees each per harvest. We can help each other out because we know we will earn from our crops. We are able to get loans easily from a bank, and a family can borrow from within the group to pay for children's education. Then that family can repay the other members without interest." More than 44000 such groups now exist in Kerala, improving lives of quarter of a million impoverished women.

South Asia Country Research Teams presented their main findings of a systematic review of agricultural research on five key issues, at the regional workshop of the Global Development Network (GDN) research project, 'Supporting Policy Research to Inform Agricultural Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia'. The five vital topics include: Irrigation and Water Use Efficiency; Agricultural Pricing and Public Procurement; Managing Agricultural Commercialization for Inclusive Growth; Long-term Challenges to Food Security and Rural Livelihoods; and Improving the Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability of Fertilizer Use.

The purpose of the workshop was to present an Asian perspective on agricultural research and policy issues.

"Sri Lanka anticipates a 7% GDP growth this year despite the global economic downturn and food security and domestic agricultural growth is one of the key factors in the economic landscape," Hon. Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Senior Minister for International Monetary Co-operation, , The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, said at the opening ceremony of the workshop. "The global economic crisis and increasing energy costs mean Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries can no longer rely on importing foodstuffs like food cereals so national food security is important for sovereignty and self-sufficiency, so this seminar is absolutely important," he said.

But there are many challenges.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Hon. Krishibid Shawkat Momen Shahjahan, Member of Parliament and Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh said, "Agriculture in South Asia is facing severe challenges. Pressures on the land and climate change are putting pressure on the agricultural system".

"It is time for us to think ahead and think about events such as natural disasters," said Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Minister of Agriculture, The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

"For example this year we have had a bumper crop of fish in the western province not because of improved fishing, but the fish beached themselves on our shores due to climate change. So these are areas that we must concentrate our research on in future."

Over the last 12 months, five country research teams from leading universities and organizations in South Asia, along with the Project Steering Committee and Research Assistants, reviewed extensive published and unpublished research on five vital agricultural development issues.

The event culminated with the official launch of the five GDN Agricultural Policy Briefs by Dr. George Mavrotas, Project Director and Chief Economist at GDN. The briefs summarize the findings emanating from the five agricultural policy research papers.

"Agriculture remains an extremely vital sector for millions of people in South Asia, including small farmers in the region who are crucially dependent on agriculture. Yet, we need to delve deeper into agricultural policy issues by providing policymakers, the media and the wider public with research which is scientifically rigorous but at the same time timely and easily accessible to them", says Dr. Mavrotas, GDN Chief Economist and Project Director. "This is one of the reasons why GDN and agricultural policy researchers from South Asia have been working on this project across the region", he said.

The event is held in partnership with the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka. Dr. Saman Kelegama, Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka said, "New research into agricultural policy is vital because the sector supports 30-60 per cent of the population in South Asia and plays a key role in reducing poverty and supporting food security".

40 participants attended the event. The consortium of policymakers, agricultural researchers and key experts, and private sector players who met here, came from several policy planning organizations and other institutions spread across South Asia including the Government of Sri Lanka, Government of Bangladesh, regional research institutes (Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Centre for Environment and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development in Nepal, National Agribusiness Council in Sri Lanka and Indian Institute of Management, India), international organizations (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in Sri Lanka), non-government organizations (Oxfam India and Oxfam Australia) and the private sector (ITC Agribusiness India, Valley Irrigation Pakistan Pvt. Ltd., Macro Economic Insights Pvt. Ltd., Pakistan and Hayles Agriculture Holding Ltd. in Bangladesh).

Following the rich and successful interaction between the Southern researchers and key policymakers from the region, at this event, the project will hold its first Policy Expert Roundtable in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on 16 November, 2012, in Washington DC.

***Editor's Note:***

*The event:* The Global Development Network (GDN) global research project 'Supporting Policy Research to Inform Agricultural Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia' is conducting its Regional Workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka. GDN along with policymakers, leading agricultural researchers and key experts from South Asia gathered at this event to discuss and bring forth agricultural policy issues that are relevant to the region.

The event is held in partnership with the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka.

The workshop offered South Asian policy makers, an opportunity to discuss the role that agricultural research plays in informing policy in this crucial area.

Over the last 12 months, five country research teams from leading universities and organizations in South Asia, along with the Project Steering Committee and Research Assistants, reviewed extensive published and unpublished research on five vital agricultural development issues.

At the workshop, South Asia Country Research Teams presented their main findings of a systematic review of agricultural research on five key issues. These include: Irrigation and Water Use Efficiency; Agricultural Pricing and Public Procurement; Managing Agricultural Commercialization for Inclusive Growth; Long-term Challenges to Food Security and Rural Livelihoods; and Improving the Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability of Fertilizer Use.

The interactions during the event, focused on agricultural issues related to farm inputs, irrigation, fertilizer application, mechanization, productivity, food preservation and distribution, storage and marketing infrastructure, which lend to the challenges faced by the agriculture sector today.

*The Project:* The **GDN** Global Research Project, *'Supporting Policy Research to Inform Agricultural Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia'*, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to help shape North-South and South-South debates on agricultural policies. Designed as a policy research project, it seeks to enrich the body of knowledge related to agricultural issues. In doing so, it draws from the existing knowledge base, especially cross country research findings, in a scientifically rigorous manner yet one which is both timely and easily accessible to policymakers and the informed public.

The project has a multi-prolonged outreach plan in place to enhance research uptake among policymakers, key experts and media. In doing so, the plan embraces new media technology and social media channels and intends to leverage its prowess on a global scale. The project output includes **10 Agricultural Policy Briefs, 10 Policy Research Papers and 10 Project Documentaries**. For more information on the project and for free download of the **Agricultural Policy Research App** (for iPad, iPhone, Android, Kindle) visit <http://agripolicyoutreach.org>



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Agricultural Policy Research



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*The Organization:* The **Global Development Network (GDN)** is an independent International Organization that allies researchers and institutes in development globally. Founded in 1999, GDN is headquartered in New Delhi, with offices in Cairo and Washington DC. GDN supports researchers in developing and transition countries to generate and share applied social science research to advance social and economic development. GDN's core business is building research capacity. Its aspiration is to achieve a critical mass of researchers who are globally interconnected and produce good research to impact public policy.

GDN works in collaboration with 11 Regional Network Partners as well as with international donor organizations and governments, research institutes, academic institutions, think tanks and more than 12,000 individual researchers worldwide. GDN's Global Research Capacity Building Program helps social scientists in developing and transition countries develop a mix of skills and knowledge required to become high-performing researchers. This integrated program includes the Regional Research Competitions, Global Research Competitions and the Global Research Projects. The Global Research Capacity Building Program is complemented and supported by a range of networking, outreach and dissemination activities.