



Mini-Symposium / Thematic Session 11

What's needed for higher and more stable incomes for farmers in the East Gangetic Plain: Observations from an ACIAR project

Regardless of the remarkable progress of some industries across South Asia, agriculture remains the primary source of employment and income for a large portion of the population. In addition, efforts to raise the welfare of the poor across the region cannot escape the reality that higher and more stable incomes for farm households is a key ingredient. Simultaneously, improved management of the agricultural sector to achieve higher productivity and resource sustainability is required to deliver on food security and political stability ambitions.

This panel session draws on Australian-sponsored research in the East Gangetic Plain. The research focused on the types of policies and delivery mechanisms that can increase the intensity of agricultural production, whilst simultaneously delivering more integrated and inclusive outcomes. Collectively, the body of work from this project highlights how leaders of the future will need to carefully consider the relationships between food-energy-water while dealing with important social dimensions around empowerment of women.

Paper 1: Understanding expert opinions around preferred policy and delivery options

Lin Crase, Bethany Cooper, Michael Burton

This paper explains the use of a Delphi techniques to harness information from policy experts about the most efficacious way to raise and stabilize farm household incomes across the East Gangetic Plain. The technique was adapted into a best-worst-scaling exercise that provided evidence of the future priorities for policy makers. The outputs from surveying almost 100 policy experts across India, Bangladesh and Nepal highlights the necessity to focus on access to agricultural inputs and the requirement to ensure sufficient space is provided to the private sector.

Paper 2: Teasing out the interactions between future water and energy options

Avinash Kishore

Water and energy are inextricably linked, but often the linkages are only obvious ex post. This paper considers a range of energy policies and how they have impacted access and use of groundwater in the region. The paper specifically considers the case of West Bengal, where energy policies have varied over time to generate quite different outcomes. The paper also explores options for future decision makers.

Paper 3: Knowledge is not everything, but it can make a big difference

Mohammad Alam

Drawing on a range of secondary data, this paper provides an overview of important statistical relationships between knowledge transfer and agricultural outcomes. The paper is used to highlight the role of activities like agricultural extension as a means of enhancing the wellbeing of smallholders. Importantly, the work also highlights potential spillover effects to factors such as women's empowerment.

Paper 5: Changing farmer behaviour – an analysis of why adopting higher-tech solutions needs careful planning

Jeff Connor

In many parts of South Asia agricultural innovation and change rests on external agencies demonstrating the benefits of technological adoption. In this paper we explore why non-adoption might emerge by using monte carlo simulations to predict how farmers might perceive the net benefits of change. The paper highlights the value of understanding the down-side risks of adopting a new technology.

Paper 5: Women are not the same as men, so the feminization of agriculture needs a rethink as does its measurement

Bethany Cooper, Sophie Lountain, Avinash Kishore

The empowerment of women has been assigned a high priority in most policy circles across South Asia. Simultaneously, changes in the gender roles in agriculture have seen more women taking greater responsibility, regardless of the perception that farming is men's work. This paper explores three issues. First it considers how current policy arrangements have not kept pace with feminization, with many support structures specifically tailored to meet the needs of men. Second, the paper explores how carefully chosen policies might deliver multiple benefits. Third, we contemplate gaps in the current data collection processes that require urgent attention if policy makers are serious about dealing empowerment of women.

Organisers:

Discussants: