1. Engaging with relevant actors

This work incorporates inputs from actors at macro, meso and micro levels, to understand the current settings for food systems in the large region, at provincial levels and among local communities in the Nepal Terai. Scientists, policy makers and development professionals from a range of sectors identified major trends and drivers that impact the food system, and subsequently food and nutrition security.

At the local level, communities (urban and rural) and local government actors confirmed current priorities, defined future visions and considered options for transforming smallholder agriculture.

2. Understanding the system of analysis

In Nepal, agriculture accounts for one third of the country’s GDP, and employs two thirds of the population, with almost equal levels of employment for men and women. 52% of rural households are food insecure, with a further 10% severely food insecure. Farming systems are dominated by smallholders who have less than 0.5 ha of land and have limited access to inputs, including irrigation and fertilisers. These systems are mostly at subsistence level, with few opportunities for commercial approach. Land fragmentation is a major constraint to development. Cropping systems are cereal based, with rice accounting for 43% of area (52% of food production). Maize, wheat, millet, barley and buckwheat are other common rainfed crops. Cereal productivity is among the lowest in South Asia, primarily due to a reliance on monsoon rainfall and low input systems.

Province 2 is located in the southern Tarai plains, and is the most populous sub-region of the country. It is located in the most fertile plain area of the country, and therefore has the potential for agricultural production, representing around 22 – 26% of the cropped area of rice and wheat respectively and 17.5% of the total cereal production of the country. However, it was previously considered the “food basket” of Nepal, this has changed and for the past 15 years has been food deficit. The long and porous border with India to the south means that market access can alleviate pressure for food availability. Levels of outmigration are high, with 50% of all migrants coming from the Tarai region. The province is highly prone to flood and drought disasters, and agriculture productivity is in decline. Average land holding size is higher than the national average at about 3 ha per household. Farming systems are mostly subsistence and semi-commercial agriculture; where farming is still semi-traditional, mostly based on peer learning, intuition and traditional local knowledge systems. There is some semi-commercial farming, where cereals and pulses are produced partly for markets; vegetables and cooking oil are both sold and purchased from the market. There are weak policies regarding agriculture price support, storage, food transport and distribution which exacerbate food insecurity.

3. A shared understanding of drivers and trends

4. Aligning visions

This work aims to enable stakeholders at all levels to take a longer-term overview of the food system, and to choose actions now that lead to a preferred future state. It does so recognising that although problems can be regional, the levels for change are often found at the local level. The impacts of these micro, meso and macro level changes remain current and agriculture food security need to be better understood for long term transformation of the food system.

Local level actors can provide a more nuanced understanding of the drivers affecting food systems.

Exploring visions with different stakeholders can explore whether the align, and identify action points.

In Nepal, the new federal system requires all levels of government working together effectively for the food system to be better adapted and supported. One opportunity for doing this is to leverage the five AMCs which are currently attached from the wider system both vertically and horizontally in terms of knowledge gathering and knowledge dissemination.

With better coordination between existing agricultural development, research and extension institutions it is possible to make AMCs an effective vehicle to support food security and sustainable food systems. This is being tested in a subsequent project.

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