

SDG Blueprint for Sustainable Agriculture: Expert Consultation

10th October 2023

SUMMARY NOTE

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

- India's approach to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) involves understanding the growth models that farmers desire. This entails recognizing opportunities and capabilities that enhance productivity while not only creating decent jobs but also jobs that add value to the economy. Unlike many other countries, India's economic development has taken a unique path. In the traditional economic development literature, the Lewis model often describes a transition from agriculture to industrialization. However, in India, this shift has primarily been toward the services sector, which, unfortunately, hasn't generated substantial employment or significant value addition. Nevertheless, India's service sector can play a pivotal role in supporting and augmenting the agricultural sector.
- Key issues include the unavailability of guarantees or collateral for loans, lack of awareness about provisions, and the dependency on environmental and climatic conditions for agricultural output. These issues are compounded by the difficulty of establishing last-mile connectivity and regulating the flow of credit to the grassroots level. One significant opportunity lies in providing training to address these challenges and using information technology to connect with and support farmers.
- It is imperative to focus on the modernization and enhancement of key agricultural institutions like the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and the Kisan Call Centre. These institutions play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge and expertise to farmers. Their upgradation, especially in terms of technology adoption, should be closely aligned with the ground realities of Indian agriculture. This would ensure that the latest innovations and practices are accessible to farmers in a way that can be effectively implemented.
- A major challenge is the lack of collective bargaining and visibility for small and marginal labour, especially women farmers who often work informally. Strengthening the institutional framework, including the banking system and state-led institutions, is crucial to address these issues.
- The principles set by the International Labour Organization (ILO), such as abolishing child labour and ensuring equal pay for equal work, need to be upheld to create a fair and sustainable agricultural sector. The need for data on green provisions, the informal nature of labour, and the complexity of the credit system also present significant challenges. Access to social security benefits for informal workers and clear definitions for farmers remain unresolved issues.
- Gender mainstreaming and proper training for female farmers are vital to empower women in agriculture as there is an alarming trend of decreasing or stagnant labour force participation among women in agriculture. Many are moving towards unpaid domestic work rather than participating in the formal labour force. To foster gender

equality and harness the full potential of the female workforce, it is imperative to create opportunities that empower women economically.

- Efforts should focus on promoting women's participation in agriculture, addressing the lack of credit history for women, and implementing technology to provide credit. Sustainable mechanization, crop insurance, and transparency in credit and carbon credit transactions are avenues for improvement. Proper training for women for gender mainstreaming- training to female farmers women-led startups and entrepreneurial activities. – and awareness of the existing schemes and policies is important.
- Utilization of technology for data collection holds immense potential. By replacing traditional surveys conducted by government agencies like MOSPI with the involvement of "Krishi Mitras" and active call centers on the ground, data can be collected more efficiently and accurately. This transition to digital data collection can not only enhance the speed and accuracy of information gathering but also involves local expertise, creating a more nuanced understanding of the agricultural landscape.
- Around 80% of workers in agriculture operate in the informal sector, devoid of social security benefits (as per Periodic Labour Force Survey). This issue is closely linked to the broader economic growth of the country. The absence of social security measures for these workers not only leaves them economically vulnerable but also hinders their potential contribution to the nation's development. Furthermore, the lack of a clear and comprehensive definition for "farmers" exacerbates the problem. Without proper categorizations, it becomes challenging to extend social security benefits to those who need them most. There is a need for well-defined classifications and policies that can ensure that farmers are included within the social security net.
- Another issue is the precarious nature of employment in the sector, where only 20% of workers have formal contracts. This lack of job security means that the majority of labourers can be removed from their positions at any time, furthering their economic instability. Despite the challenges, India's agricultural sector continues to exhibit promising growth, with a current projected annual growth rate of 3.5% in the GDP. A notable opportunity lies in post-harvest management, which represents a significant portion of the agricultural value chain. Improving post-harvest handling, storage, and distribution can significantly reduce food wastage and enhance the overall economic impact of agriculture.
- One avenue for progress is through formal institutions that bring farmers together. These institutions provide a platform for collective action, knowledge sharing, and the pursuit of common goals. By strengthening these organizations, such as Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), opportunities can be created for farmers to have a stronger voice in policy and decision-making processes.
- The repercussions of climate change necessitate the involvement of diverse stakeholders in promoting productive and sustainable agriculture. Climate-resilient practices, the incorporation of technology, and the adoption of mechanization are critical components of adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change in agriculture. This multifaceted approach is essential to safeguarding the sector's long-term viability.
- Furthermore, there is a need for greater integration and coordination of agricultural schemes at both the state and central government levels. The current fragmented landscape can be streamlined to ensure that various initiatives work cohesively towards common objectives. This would reduce redundancies and optimize resource allocation for maximum impact.

- Recognizing the diverse nature of agriculture in India, a blanket approach to policies and schemes may not be viable. Landholding capacities vary across regions, with northern, central, and eastern parts of the country having distinct agricultural characteristics. The application of schemes, such as insurance policies, should be fine-tuned to reflect these ground realities, ensuring that they genuinely benefit the intended beneficiaries.
- Priority sector lending (PCL) allows farmers to obtain loans against their agricultural produce, typically spanning 12 months, with the produce serving as collateral. The loan is secured against the expected yield and is redeemed with the receipts from warehouses. To ensure the efficient dissemination of the PCL system, an intelligent data solution is needed. This system must pinpoint the vulnerability aspects of cultivable land to understand the impact of disasters. Such insights enable a targeted and effective allocation of loans, particularly to the last mile of the agricultural community. This underscores the importance of establishing integrated data ecosystems, breaking down silos to create a cohesive and responsive data infrastructure.
- Another crucial aspect of Indian agriculture is the prevalence of community-based farming. This approach often sees farmers replicating each other's practices. To enhance sustainability, the promotion of local champions becomes vital. These local champions can serve as role models, inspiring their fellow farmers to adopt more sustainable and efficient practices. Collaborations between farmers, banks, and relevant institutions can support local champions in driving multi-market and multi-model farming, catalysing a positive transformation in agriculture.
- The integration of various agricultural schemes offered by both state and central governments is another area of importance. Coordinating these schemes can reduce redundancies, optimize resource allocation, and streamline the support provided to farmers. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is not viable for Indian agriculture, given the diverse landholding capacities in different regions. Tailoring policies to the specific needs of each region can ensure that they genuinely benefit the intended communities.
- India's economic landscape encompasses a substantial amount of informal employment, accompanied by inequalities among various service sectors. To address these disparities and foster innovation, policies and schemes need to adapt and encourage startups that can bridge these gaps.
- The technology harnessed in the agricultural sector can emerge as a significant export. This innovative potential can lead to a thriving market for agricultural products, both nationally and internationally. While India has prioritized the livelihoods of its farmers, certain policy decisions, such as the rice export ban, have raised concerns in neighbouring regions. This highlights the need to harmonize agricultural and trade policies positively.
- A comprehensive agricultural reform is imperative not only for transitioning to climate-resilient agriculture but also for addressing nutrition concerns. The Green Revolution, while contributing to development, has led to a monoculture of crops. To rectify this, experimentation with diversifying agricultural products, like incorporating pulses into the Public Distribution System (PDS), is essential to ensure a balanced and nutritious diet for the population. Moreover, the private sector can play a vital role by identifying geographies with potential for small markets. Investing in creating value-added products at the regional and local levels can generate employment and contribute to the economic growth of these areas.

- Creating value addition at the local level is a crucial aspect of India's agricultural strategy. However, there are challenges in the post-production phase of crops and farming that need to be addressed to fully harness this potential. To tackle these issues effectively, examples from states like Odisha, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh highlight the significance of forging market linkages. This involves the establishment of Mandis (marketplaces), Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and cooperatives.
- Participatory irrigation management institutions exist across the country, offering a unique opportunity for employment generation. To unlock this potential, it is essential to streamline revenue generation within these institutions. This not only benefits the farmers by improving their irrigation systems but also contributes to the sustainable management of natural resources. Moreover, policy coherence and convergence are essential, particularly in schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This convergence should extend to activities related to water security plans, water usage, and water association. Such an approach promotes sustainable resource management and fosters a harmonious relationship between employment generation and agriculture.
- To promote the generation of carbon credits, transparency is key, particularly in the transfer of these credits and the associated monetary benefits to farmers. This transparency ensures that the system operates fairly and equitably.
- The health of the soil is fundamental for identifying vulnerable areas. Collaboration between the government and data collected from sources like GIS and remote sensing can help pinpoint these areas and groups that need special attention. Implementing green budgeting, as seen in Bihar, where separate budgeting is allocated for these vulnerable areas and their populations, can further aid in their development and resilience. Baseline data collection is a critical component of identifying vulnerable groups. This data provides an accurate picture of the situation and supports further studies using secondary data sources.
- Creating a dynamic dashboard that provides real-time updates on vulnerable areas is essential. This tool can track budget allocations and expenditures in these regions, enhancing transparency and accountability. Integrated dashboards can offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing schemes and monitor the progress of new ones. This approach ensures that policies do not become overly focused on yield-specific calculations but instead consider holistic and sustainable outcomes.
- Collaborations with institutions like IITs and ICMR can be instrumental in promoting sustainable agricultural development. Their expertise can help provide farmers with the necessary knowledge and resources to thrive in an ever-changing agricultural landscape.
- The resilience and inclusivity of the agricultural sector are vital. This requires expanding the definition of farmers to include landless labourers, tenants, and sharecroppers. These marginalized groups need support and recognition in agricultural policies.
- Drudgery in farming practices is a concern, as high mechanization can lead to labourers losing their livelihoods. To address this, the integration of self-help groups (SHGs) and limited liability management may offer sustainable and balanced approaches to agricultural mechanization. Shared responsibility can help reduce the cost of farming, benefitting both farmers and the government. Additionally, tackling food wastage at various stages of the value chain necessitates the introduction of Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) to incentivize the reduction of wastage.

- To summarize the discussion, India's approach to SDG 8 revolves around understanding farmers' perspectives towards development, leveraging the service sector's potential and bridging inequalities, recognizing the innovative capacity of the agricultural sector, pursuing agricultural reforms for sustainability and nutrition, and fostering synergies between agricultural and trade policies. These considerations provide a roadmap for India's agricultural policies, emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, sustainability, and a holistic approach to agricultural development.

SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals)

- Encourage partnerships for capacity building with sustainable agriculture organizations and institutions at local, national, and international levels. Promote sustainable agriculture practices such as organic farming and permaculture, which not only diversify income but also reduce environmental impact and align with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). Foster partnerships between local NGOs and international organizations, aligning with SDG 17. Such partnerships can mobilize resources and expertise for sustainable agriculture and water management.
- Implement infrastructure improvements in a manner that minimizes environmental impact, aligning with SDG 15 (Life on Land) and considering ecological sustainability. Partner with international organizations to ensure consistent project cycles and knowledge exchange.
- Collaborate with international agricultural organizations to ensure that farmers benefit from sustainable agriculture practices and have access to global markets. Involve international organizations and NGOs as neutral parties to mediate and build trust between farmers and the government. Partner with international research institutions to develop innovative, science-based schemes that align with SDG 17 for sustainable agriculture. Encourage land tenure reforms in collaboration with international organizations to promote secure land ownership, which can boost investment in sustainable agriculture.
- Collaborate with organizations specializing in water treatment technology to develop cost-effective and sustainable methods in line with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). Partner with international data and technology firms to improve data accessibility, transparency, and streamline bureaucratic procedures. Collaborate with international environmental organizations to promote eco-friendly alternatives and address plastic waste management, supporting SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Work with international trade organizations to ensure fair pricing and market access, aligning with SDG 2.
- Promote collaboration between central and state governments through international platforms and agreements, aligning with the global partnership aspect of SDG 17. Collaborate with international engineering firms and agencies to retrofit and upgrade infrastructure in an environmentally sustainable manner, supporting SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Partner with international financial institutions to provide green credit and financial incentives for sustainable agricultural practices. Seek support from international organizations that specialize in community leadership and development, fostering local champions and aligning with the inclusivity aspect of SDG 17.
- Collaborate with international media and communication agencies to share success stories globally, inspiring other regions to adopt sustainable agriculture practices. Partner with international agencies and clean energy organizations to facilitate the adoption of solar pumps. Collaborate with international water management experts to implement wastewater treatment and revenue generation schemes, contributing to SDG 6.
- Partner with international health organizations to ensure that treated water is safe for agriculture and public health, aligning with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Collaborate with international IT firms to develop a comprehensive single-window data platform, improving data accessibility.

- Seek guidance from international agencies with expertise in community-centered approaches and localization of projects, aligning with SDG 17. Collaborate with international water management experts to implement groundwater recharge strategies.
- Partner with international agricultural and training institutions to provide ongoing capacity building, contributing to SDG 4 (Quality Education). Collaborate with international monitoring and evaluation organizations to ensure accountability at all levels, aligning with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Involve international financial auditors and organizations to oversee fund utilization, aligning with SDG 16. Collaborate with international statistical agencies to ensure accurate data disaggregation, supporting SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).
- Partner with international hydrologists and water resource experts to promote integrated water management, aligning with SDG 6. Collaborate with international climate organizations to incorporate climate-resilient practices into water management schemes, aligning with SDG 13 (Climate Action). Partner with international technology firms to implement advanced metering for groundwater. Collaborate with international communication and technology agencies to enhance information dissemination, aligning with SDG 9. Establish coordination mechanisms with international bodies to ensure water quality and pollution control, aligning with SDG 6 and 14. Collaborate with international agricultural organizations to promote integrated farming practices.
- Partner with international trade and market access organizations to prepare farmers for global markets. By incorporating these additional elements into the water management strategy, it becomes more aligned with sustainable agriculture practices and the global goals of SDG 17, ensuring a holistic and inclusive approach.