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SAARC Agriculture Centre Celebrates the 39th SAARC Chartered Day 2023

The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) organized a momentous occasion joyfully to mark the 39th SAARC Chartered Day at the BARC complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on December 10, 2023. This celebration brought together High Commissioners and Ambassadors from SAARC Member States, high-ranking government officials, senior scientists, development partners, experts, media representatives, and other stakeholders in a collective reflection on the journey of regional cooperation in agriculture and allied discipline. Honorable guests ceremoniously hosted Member States' flags and released doves, symbolizing a collective commitment to peace and cooperation.

Ms. Wahida Akter, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. His Excellency Ambassador Abdul Motaleb Sarker, Director General, SAARC and BIMSTEC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh joined as the Special Guest. Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Bakhtiar, Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), chaired the event with distinction, embodying the commitment to regional collaboration.The Director of SAC, Dr. Md. Baktear Hossain, opened the festivities with a warm welcome, paving the way for a profound experience. Dr. Ganga Dutta Acharya, Senior Program Specialist (PSPD) of SAC, delivered a compelling keynote speech on "Agri-food Systems Transformation for Better Nutrition: Pathways for South Asia in Bangladesh." This discourse shed light on SAC's continuous efforts to address challenges in agriculture,

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livestock, and fisheries, emphasizing sustainability, food security, and consumer well-being. Chief Guest, Mrs. Wahida Akter in her speech, emphasized the pivotal role of agriculture in the region, supporting over 50% of livelihoods and employment, contributing 18.2% to the GDP. Acknowledging challenges such as climate change and shrinking land, she stressed the importance of knowledge management for climate-smart agriculture. Special Guest, Dr. Abdul Motaleb Sarker, Ambassador of SAARC and BIMSTEC, expressed deep gratitude for Bangladesh's role in SAARC's establishment. He assured unwavering support from the Government of Bangladesh, underlining the importance of SAC in fostering regional success.

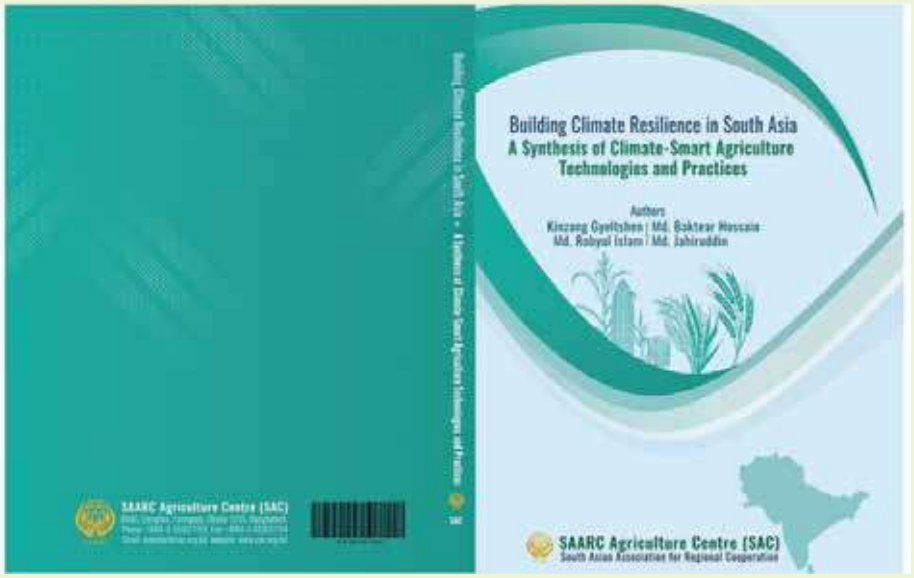
In the concluding speech, Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Bakhtiar highlighted SAC's programs, including the PhD program, and expressed gratitude for the appreciation from Member States. He emphasized the significance of recent events, such as the C-SUCSeS Policy Roundtable, and stressed the need for the future continuation of C-SUCSeS as the premier regional forum on Climate Smart Agriculture.

He also added that the Member States of the SAARC signed the charter on December 8, 1985, during the inaugural Summit meeting in Dhaka. This visionary document set the stage for collaborative endeavors to ensure livelihoods, food security, and nutritional well-being in South Asia.

Unveiling the Synthesis of Climate-Smart Agriculture in South Asia at SAARC Chartered Event

The book "Building Climate Resilience in South Asia: A Synthesis of Climate-Smart Agriculture Technologies and practices" was launched at SAARC Charter Day event in December 2023, attended by esteemed figures including the Honorable Secretary of Agriculture of Bangladesh Ms. Wahida Akter and Director General of SAARC And BIMSTEC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh Ambassador Mr. Abdul Motaleb Sarker. The culmination of the Consortium for Scaling up Climate-Smart Agriculture in South Asia (C-SUCSeS) project, the book synthesizes insight from individual publications on Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) Across Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Addressing climate adaptation and mitigation strategies in agriculture, it aims to ensure food, nutrition and livelihood security amidst climate change challenges, providing a comprehensive overview of

agriculture in SAARC member countries while offering policy recommendations for regional cooperation and adoption of CSA technologies tailored to South Asia's unique environmental conditions, underscoring a collective commitment to advancing sustainable agricultural practices in the region.



First Project Steering Committee Meeting of the C-SUCSeS Project Held in Sri Lanka

The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) and International Food and Policy Research (IFPRI) jointly organized the first project steering committee (PSC) meeting of the 'Consortium for Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia (C-SUCSeS)' project and the Policy Roundtable from October 27 to 29, 2023, at Kandy in Sri Lanka. The PSC meeting brought together a high-level delegation from SAARC member states of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. The meeting was chaired by Dr Shaikh Mohammad Bokhtiar, Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council, and co-chaired by Dr Md Baktear Hossain, Director of SAARC Agriculture Centre.

The inaugural session of the meeting was graced by Agriculture Minister of Sri Lanka Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera and he also launched the 'Network of Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia: Community of Practice (CoP)' and unveiled six books on 'Climate Smart Agriculture Technologies and Practices' produced by the SAARC member states.

The minister highly appreciated the contributions of the project in building climate-resilient farming communities in South Asia to further sustainable agricultural production. He said climate-smart agriculture is a collective effort and we need the involvement of all stakeholders from farmers and agricultural associations to researchers, policymakers, and international organizations. “Together, we can create a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector,” he said, adding that the network of CSA will pave the way to share and exchange knowledge, establish collaboration and communication, build professional capacity, and explore innovative ideas on CSA to combat climate change impact.

Dr Baktear Hossain said C-SUCSeS Project is a pioneering initiative aimed at scaling up climate-smart agriculture practices in South Asian countries. He added that the project places great importance on collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and innovation. In this spirit, the project is proud to introduce an online network that will serve as a platform for stakeholders, experts, and enthusiasts to share knowledge, research, and experiences related to climate-smart agriculture.

Speaking on the occasion, Director General of Agriculture Department in Sri Lanka, P Malathy, said: “We must continuously seek new and improved practices, ones that not only reduce our environmental impact but also increase our agricultural yields and enhance the well-being of our farming communities. This is the essence of the C-SUCSeS Project.”

Director of SAARC Secretariat Jamal Uddin Ahmed commented that "the event is a testament to the commitment of SAARC Leaders to promote CSA technologies in South Asia. This multi-country project is the first of its kind in the region, coming at a time when climate change has emerged as a significant threat to the agricultural landscape."

IFPRI Research Coordinator Dr. Mamata Pradhan said, "CSA as an approach is not entirely new. Over the years our farmers have been sharing their CSA insights as they adapted to changing weather patterns. But there is a need to develop and scale-up resilience and adaptability when it comes to environment and climate change for the countries in this region to ensure achievement of food and livelihood security."

Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Bakhtiar said South Asia is home to 25 percent of the world's population and occupies only 4 percent of the world's land."COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine War, and the immense negative impact of climate change remind us of the critical importance of agriculture and how it is affected by climate change,' he said. He emphasized the importance of the consortium and its focus on prioritizing climate-smart agriculture (CSA). "Currently, there is no other consortium like this. Therefore, we must ensure its success in the battle against climate change," he added.

The roundtable has brought together policymakers, scientists, researchers, extension agents, farmers' representatives and private sector delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. This roundtable dedicated to understanding of CSA in the South Asia context and exploring strategies, and programmatic approaches aimed at scaling up the adoption of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) technologies by smallholder and women farmers in South Asia.

SAARC Agriculture Centre Delegation Monitors Livelihood Enhancement Project in Sri Lanka

On 26 October 2023, a high-level delegation from SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) led by Dr. Md. Baktear Hossain, Director of SAC and Dr. Md. Younus Ali, the project coordinator and Senior Program Specialist of livestock at SAC, Dhaka, Bangladesh along with Mr. Jamal Uddin, Director Agriculture and Rural Development of SAARC Secretariat Nepal embarked on a significant visit to Sri Lanka. Their mission: to monitor the implementation of project initiatives aimed to enhancing livelihood of small-farmers across the SAARC region through small-scale agro businesses, with a focus to value chain development.

The team visited to the fruit and vegetable processing centre in Neelabamma, situated in Auradhapura, a prominent city approximately 205 Km north of Colombo. Auradhapura is renowned as major agriculture hub with the in North Western Province, Sri Lanka.

During the visit the delegates meticulously examined the various machinery and facilities They provided by the project, all tailored to streamline the processing and value addition of agricultural produces. Engaging directly with the beneficiaries and exchanged views with the beneficiaries they exchanged insights and perspectives, gauging the tangible impact of the project on local communities.

Monitoring of SAARC Agriculture Ph D Scholar in Sri Lanka

On 25 October 2023, a delegation from SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) led by Dr. Md. Baktear Hossain, Director and Dr. Md. Younus Ali, Senior program Specialist (Livestock) and SAARC Agriculture Ph D scholarship coordinator, embarked on a visit to the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture (PGIA), at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka to meet Mr. M.M. Aruna Sampath Maheepala, a SAARC Agriculture Ph D scholar engaged in pioneering research within the fieldof Socio-Economic and Marketing Research of Marine Fisheries.

Mr. Maheepala, a senior scientist at the Socio-Economic and Marketing Research Division of National Aquatic Resources Research and development Agency (NARA), Sri Lanka, is pursuing his Ph D at PIGA. The SAC delegation convened with Maheepala's supervisory committee, exchanging insights and apprising of his research endeavor.

The following day, the delegation ventured to the marine fisheries grounds along the east coast of Negombo, Sri Lanka. Accompanied by SAARC PhD fellow Mr. M.M. S. Aruna Maheepala, the team explored export processing area and engaged with local fishermen to gain a firsthand understanding of the socio-economics dynamics and environment conditions prevalent in coastal fisheries.

Negombo, situated on the west coast in the western Province, is renowned for its historic fishing industries and vibrant coastal culture. During their visit the delegation had the opportunity to interview Mr. Marvin, a seasoned fisherman, delivering into his experiences and perspectives on the present state of the coastal fisheries and environmental sustainability of Sri Lanka.

SAC Successfully Hosted the 15th Governing Board Meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka

The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) marked another milestone in its journey towards regional agricultural advancement with successful organization of the 15th Governing Board (GB) Meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 15-16 November 2023 after three years of pause covid -19 pandemic and for regional issues. Despite the challenges posed by the on-going global situation, the meeting seamlessly integrated a hybrid format allowing participation both in person and virtually.

Dr. Shaikh Mohammad Bokhtiar of Bangladesh, Dr. D K Yadava of India, Dr. Aminath Safia of Maldives, and Dr. WART Wickramaarachchi of Sri Lanka graced the meeting in person. Meanwhile, Mr. Karma Tshering of Bhutan, Mr. Prokash K Sanjel of Nepal, and Mr. Imtiaz Ali Gopangof Pakistan joined virtually demonstrating SAC's commitment to inclusive and collaboration across boarder.

Mr. Jamal Uddin Ahmed, Director (ARD), SAARC secretariat also graced the meeting. The two days long meeting was conducted under the chairmanship of newly elected GH chair of Dr. Aminath Safia of Maldives. The meeting thoroughly reviewed the progress of program activities conducted by the Centre in the immediate past and current fiscal years. Similarly, the meeting endorsed the Centre's regular programs and 20 different need-based programs for the year 2024.

Dr. Nasreen Sultana from SAC Attended the 10th TAP Parter Assembly

After becoming the member of Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP), Dr. Nasreen Sultana, Senior Programme Specialist (Horticulture) of SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) participated for the first time to the 10th annual TAP Partner Assembly, held from November 21 to 23, 2023, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. TAP, a G20 initiative established in 2012, aims to bridge capacity gaps for agricultural innovation in tropical regions, enhancing coherence and effectiveness of interventions for sustainable impact. With 52 partners, TAP promotes an Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) perspective, fostering multilateral facilitation for capacity development.

Partners and key stakeholders gatheredin Addis Ababa for three days of knowledge exchange and learning about the role of the TAP in addressing agrifood systems challenges in low and middle-income countries. Each day of the Assembly featured technical sessions and group work that delved into issues such as gender equality, women-led innovations, policy advocacy, increased investments, and youth inclusion, in relation to agricultural innovation. Dr. Sultana actively participated in each session and contributed as a panel member during the third session on policy advocacy and investments in AIS.

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) Hosted a Training on Agri-business Management in Chennai

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) conducted a comprehensive regional training program on Contemporary and Strategic Issues in Agri-businesses Management Focusing Value Chain Development" on 27-29 November 2023 at MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Chennai, India. As part of the SAC's on-going Livelihood Enhancement project funded by the SDF, the training initiative aimed to address critical challenges and opportunities in agri-business management, particularly emphasizing value chain development.

The MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, serving as the Implementing Agencies of SAC's Livelihood enhancement project in India. Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, the Chairperson of the MSSRF graced the inaugural session as the Chief Guest highlighted the importance of collaboration and knowledge exchange in advancing agricultural initiatives.

Dr. Md. Harunur Rashid Appointed as Director of SAARC Agriculture Centre

Dr. Md Harunur Rashid, the Chief Scientific Officer of crop division of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and former director NATP 2 PIU and a distinguish figure in the field of agricultural research and policy joined as the director of the SAARC Agriculture Centre on 17 December 2023. With 27 years of his career, Dr. Rashid has demonstrated exceptional expertise as a crop systems specialist, policy researcher, skilled participatory trainer. He has played pivotal roles in various organizations, contributing significantly to the advancement of agricultural technology and policy formulation.

At BARC, Dr. Rashid served in multiple capacities, including Director of the Project Implementation Unit for the National Agricultural Technology Program Phase ll Project (NATP-2). During his tenure, he over saw the implementation of numerous research projects, facilitated in country and overseas PhD programs, and conducted training workshops for scientists with in National Agricultural Research Systems. His leadership led to the generation and validation of numerous technologies, along with the publication of research highlights and policy documents. Prior to his role in BARC, Dr. Rashid held positions as scientific and senior scientific officer at Bangladesh Rice Research Institute where he contributed extensively technology development, testing and dissemination in rice farming systems. He managed donor funded projects and maintained strong collaboration with international organizations, earning recognitions for his outstanding contribution to technology innovation and uptake pathway development. Dr. Rashid also worked in IRRI in PETRA project, where he played a crucial role for disseminating improved rice varieties and production technologies in southwestern region of Bangladesh. His efforts in coordinating in research and development activities among various global organizations significantly enhanced agricultural productivity and resilience. In addition, he served in National Academy for Primary Education as assistant specialist/instructor. He has authored numerous publications in national and international peer reviewed journals, wrote several book chapters and popular articles reflecting his dedication to knowledge dissemination and capacity building. A an IRRI scholar, Dr. Rashid obtained PhD from Bangladesh Agricultural University.

SAARC PhD Progress Sharing Meeting held in Virtual Mode

A PhD progress sharing meeting under the SAARC Agriculture PhD Scholarship Program was held on 27 December 2023 organized by the SAARC Agriculture Centre in virtual mode. The meeting started with a hearty greeting to all the fellows. Dr. Md. Younus Ali, Senior Program Specialist (Livestock), SAC delivered his warm wishes and heartfelt thanks in his welcome speech to the respected chairman and other fellows for joining the SAARC PhD Progress sharing meeting. Dr. Harunur Rashid, Director SAARC Agriculture Centre delivered an inaugural speech in the inaugural session. In his remarks, he focused on the importance of the SAARC PhD Scholarship Program and requested the fellows to complete the PhD activities within 3years of time. After the inaugural session, the technical session was conducted under the chairmanship of Dr. Md. Abdur Razzaque, Former Executive Chairman, BARC.

The total three fellows (Mr. Anas KK, Dr. Sowjanya Lakshmi and Mr Aruna Maheepala) of the SAARC PhD program presented the progress activities. The above fellows are pursuing their PhD at ICAR-CIFT, India, ICAR-IVRI, India and PGIA, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. A farewell ceremony of Dr. Sowjanya was held virtually. Finaly, Dr. Rashid Director SAC concluded the meeting through Vote of thanks.

SAC Bids Farewell to Dr. Fatema Nasrin Jahan, SPO (NRM)

On 22nd November 2023, SAC arranged a farewell party for Dr. Fatema Nasrin Jahan, Senior Program Officer in Natural Resources Management, who resigned from SAC in order to join the German-based international NGO, Welthungerhilfeas an Agricultural Economic Specialist. She served SAC for more than nine years,during which she was involved in assisting with several regional program developments, executions and reporting. Through these programs, she gained experience in the fields offood and nutrition security, market and value chain development, rural advisory services, livelihoods, gender empowermentand climate change mitigation. Additionally, she served as the Assistant Editor of SAARC Journal of Agriculture and the Chairman of the procurement committee of SAC. She obtained Ph. D.in Horticulture from Bangladesh Agricultural University and published several articles in renownednational and international journals. As a part of her Ph D research work, five varieties of Dioscorea (an underutilized crop of food security importance) were recently released by the National Variety Release Committee of Bangladesh Government. We wish her success in all aspects of her future endeavors.

SAC Hosts Heartwarming Reception for the Incoming and Outgoing Directors

On 31 December 2023, SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) organizeda touching reception to welcome Dr. Md. Harunur Rashid, the newly appointed Director, and bid farewell to Dr. Md. Baktear Hossain, who has served as the 11th Director of SAC. Dr. Baktear,during his farewell speech, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve as the director of SAC, highlighting that his tenure at the Centre has been the best part of his service life. “You will remail in my heart” Dr. Baktear stated emotionally, thanking his former colleagues and expressing appreciation for the warm farewell organized by Dr. Rashid and SAC team.

In response, Dr. Rashidexpressed his appreciation for the cooperation and support from all his colleagues at SAC. He emphasized the importance of collaboration and teamwork in advancing the goals and objectives of the centre, expressing his commitment to work closely with the SAC team to further enhance agricultural initiatives within the SAARC region.

The reception was filled heartfelt words, love and respect for Dr. Baktear, as well as warm welcomes for Dr. Rashid as he steps into his new role. It served as a poignant reminder of the bond forged within the SAC community and the spirit of camaraderie that continue to drive the center’s mission forward.

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