



**8th International Conference of the Asian Society of Agricultural Economists**

**(ASAE)**

**co-organized by BRAC**



**Conference Themes and Sub-themes**

**Theme: Viability of Small Farmers in Asia**

It is a stylized fact that with rapid rural to urban migration of the population in the process of economic development the farm size gradually expands that facilitates adoption of labor saving technologies and growth of agricultural productivity and marketed surplus for the growing urban population. The history of agricultural development demonstrates that almost all of the present day developed countries in North America and Europe followed that process. The Asian agricultural development experience, however, seems to be an exception of that stylized fact. In Japan, South Korea and Taiwan that already went through the process of economic transformation; the farm size has hardly increased despite removing restrictions on the ceiling of landownership that was imposed after the World War II. Indeed, with on-going economic progress the farm size tends to get smaller in most countries in South and Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, Pakistan and Northwestern India. Could an upward trend in real wages that will accompany rapid growth and structural reforms in developing/emerging Asia reverse the trend? Or is the Asian Agriculture going to be dominated by small and marginal farmers? Would it constrain the growth in agricultural investment, adoption of improved technologies, and agricultural productivity? What kind of public policy should be adopted to address the inherent constraints of small farms? The 2014 Conference of the Asian Society of Agricultural Economists will try to address the above issues.

**Sub-theme I: Transformation of Agrarian Structure in Asia**

This session will review the evidence of longer term transformation of the structure of landownership, operational holding, and land tenure in diverse countries with regard to the level of economic development. The change in the pressure of population on land and other natural resources, such as water and biodiversity and their impact on cropping pattern and other agricultural development strategy may also be discussed in this session.

**Sub-theme II: Farm Size and Productivity Revisited**

Following the seminal paper by Amartya Sen on “Peasants and Dualism”, a large number of studies were conducted for Asia in the 1970s that showed that small farmers are more productive than the large ones due to dominance of labor in the organization of production. Since then Asian agriculture has witnessed rapid technological progress that required substantial investment in irrigation and working capital to finance the cost on account of improved seeds, chemical fertilizers and renting of land. These developments should reduce the inherent advantages of small farms with better endowments of labor relative to capital. This session will review the evidence of productivity of small and tenant farmers vis-à-vis large ones under the changed circumstances of technological advancement and commercialization of agriculture. Experiences by some Asian countries on the impact of land consolidation to raising productivity could be showcased in this session.

**Sub-theme III: Institutional Innovations and Development of Markets for Agricultural Services**

As part-time farming with aged farmers grew in Japan and South Korea, organizations at the village level cropped up to provide small farmers tillage, harvesting and threshing services with advanced technology, to circumvent the inherent weaknesses of small and tiny farms. This session will examine to what extent such developments are taking place in other countries in Asia and what are the implications for efficiency of farming and viability of small farms.

**Sub-theme IV: Agricultural Value Chain: Linking Small Farmers to Markets**

An inherent weakness of the small farmers is the organization of marketing of small surpluses that they produce, and their exposure to large seasonal fluctuations in prices. This session will review the recent development in the agricultural value chain including contract farming by supermarkets and Agro-businesses, and how they serve the small farmers in Asian countries at different stages of development.

**Section V: Migration, Gender and Farming Systems**

The “push” factors out of the rural areas have been well documented—shortage of fertile arable land in the context of continued high population growth and poverty, landholding inequality, natural resource degradation, climate variability and including lack of infrastructure and social services. More often than not it is the young male population who depart their farms and leaving the female population to assume the major responsibility of food production. Female migration, however, does also take place primarily in search of better paying jobs.

The impact of male or female migration on farming systems has to be revisited in terms of labour profile adjustments, corresponding changes in cropping patterns and demographic strategies need. For instance, the introduction of new technology and resulting changes in farming systems need to be considered in the context of seasonal labour migration (male/female, temporary/permanent) and of the increased labour burdens they may entail on small farms in particular. The session hopes to explore once again the inter-related issues involving migration, gender and farming systems especially in the light of emerging changes in the economic, social and market environment. It will involve sharing of experiences of past efforts to respond to migration issues and correct gender bias as well as results of studies on these areas towards identifying effective and responsive policies.

**Sub-theme VI: Rural Non-farm Economy: Multi-Occupation Strategy for Sustaining Livelihoods**

The small and marginal farms cannot sustain their livelihoods depending only on farming, even with adoption of improved agricultural technologies. So they engage in multiple occupations with family members augmenting farm incomes with earnings from off-farm and non-farm activities, often as part-time occupations. Evidence shows that with economic growth a larger proportion of rural incomes come from rural non-farm activities that often are agro-based and serves the needs of agriculture and farmers. This session will review evidence on the growth rural non-farm economy and how it facilitates sustainability of livelihoods of small and marginal farms through creating opportunities of multiple occupations of a farm household.

**Sub-theme VII: Lessons from Agricultural Policy Adopted by Japan and South Korea**

What are the lessons of the agricultural development strategy and policies followed by Japan and South Korea that had already gone through agrarian transformation during the process of development? The countries changed their policies at different stages of development. Initially there was heavy public sector investment on irrigation and drainage infrastructure, heavy agricultural taxation and other measures to turn terms of trade against agriculture, land reforms particularly putting ceilings on landownership at a low level. But later the government started protecting rice farmers from competition from exporting countries that had large size farms and agricultural subsidies that helped farmers to produce at low cost. They also removed the ceiling on landownership for consolidation of farms and use of agricultural machinery. In this session we invite papers on changes in strategies and policies for agricultural development and their impact for lessons to be learnt by present day developing countries.

**Sub-theme VIII: Public Policy for Supporting Small Farms**

Support from the government for research for development of improved technology, farmer-participatory validation of such technologies, information and communication technology for reaching millions of small farmers with knowledge of improved technology and management practices, provision of credit for financing working capital needs and manipulation of terms of trade for agriculture, development and strengthening of farm cooperatives, infrastructure investment particularly irrigation and roads, and promotion of land tenure policies become more important for agriculture dominated by small farms compared to one dominated by medium and large farms. This session will review experience of Asian countries at different stages of development of the strategy and policies for agricultural development (including new institutional policies that would promote land ownership and consolidation) and will assess to what extent they support the needs of the small farmers. Questions like “what had been taken, planned and brought forward by governments to sustain agriculture sector” and “what policies need to be adopted to respond to critical issues of small farming that could lead to production inefficiencies if not addressed.