

Supporting Climate-resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Myanmar's Dry Zone

Role of National Environment Policy, National Comprehensive Development Plan and National Strategy on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development¹

fact sheet

18/2016

Key Points

- Constituent sectoral policies lack the necessary coherence and full integration required to achieve the overarching goals of food security, economic development, climate resilience and adaptation, and climate change mitigation through promotion of climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture (CRSA).
- An overarching, integrated National Sustainable Development (NSD) policy encompassing the National Environment Policy, National Comprehensive Development Plan and National Strategy on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development should be formulated, and an evidence base built to inform agroecological zone-specific action which can also contribute to the NSD policy.
- Government and non-government stakeholders must identify and upscale local solutions in view of the vulnerability of the Dry Zone to low precipitation and soil degradation, and invest technical and financial resources in encouraging crop and livelihood diversification, value addition and post-harvest processing.
- Coordination among research and extension services to promote CRSA in the Dry Zone should be strengthened, by engaging local and international NGOs and the private sector to disseminate improved technologies to smallholder farmers.

1. The Dry Zone context

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in the Central Dry Zone (CDZ) of Myanmar. Due to low soil fertility, low access to irrigation, periods of low precipitation and unpredictable monsoon rains, the Dry Zone suffers from high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The situation is further exacerbated by the unfavourable effects of climate change. There is evidence that suggests the recurrence of drought in the Dry Zone has considerably increased during the last two or three decades. The most severely affected are the poor, rural families whose livelihoods and welfare are primarily dependent upon agriculture and who have to conduct farming under difficult conditions, while constrained by the low affordability of inputs and limited knowledge of coping strategies.

The National Environment Policy (NEP), National Comprehensive Development Plan (NCDP) and the National Strategy on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development (NSPARD) are three key policy instruments for promoting climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture (CRSA) in Myanmar, in the CDZ as well as nationally. Assessing their strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the institutions and processes involved in their formulation and

implementation, in promoting CRSA can provide useful lessons for policymakers and practitioners in the country.

2. Overarching, integrated policy for multifaceted objectives

Key elements of CRSA include increasing productivity, food security and the resilience of agricultural systems, reducing greenhouse gas emissions or enhancing carbon sequestration, and managing interfaces with other land uses (Lee, 2011). NEP, NCDP and NSPARD separately cannot achieve these multifaceted objectives. An overarching, integrated policy is required, one which can also address locally appropriate adaptation and mitigation actions for CRSA including in the CDZ.

3. Strengths and weaknesses of policies and related institutions and processes

NEP, NCDP and NSPARD are comprehensive in scope, addressing economic and rural development, food security, and climate change. However, in the context of their role in promoting CRSA in CDZ:

¹ This Policy Brief draws upon a case study titled 'Policies, Institutions and Processes to Support Climate Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Myanmar's Dry Zone: Role of National Environment Policy, National Comprehensive Development Plan and National Strategy on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development' developed for the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (CAPSA-ESCAP).

National Environment Policy:

- Promulgated in 1994 in the wake of ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It aims at achieving harmony and balance between the wealth of the nation - its people and its cultural heritage.
- Key constituents of NEP are:
 - Myanmar Agenda 21
 - Forest Policy
 - Climate Change Strategy
 - Bio-diversity Conservation Policy
 - Environmental Conservation Law

National Comprehensive Development Plan:

- Consists of the 20-Year Long Term Plan (2011/12 - 2030/31) and Short Term Plan (2011/12 - 2015/16) of Agriculture and its related sectors. It includes:
 - Agriculture Development Policy
 - Fifth Five Year Development Plan
 - Livestock and Fishery Development Policy
 - Value-added Processing Policy
 - Agri-marketing Policy
 - Policy on Export and Import of Agri-products
 - Agri-credit Policy
 - Private Investment in Agriculture Policy
 - Farmer Association Policy

National Strategy on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development:

- Laid down in 2011 within the framework of the reform process in social and economic spheres. It emphasises the development of agro-based industries, equitable sharing of resources among states and regions, promotion of local and foreign investment, effective implementation of people-centred development and poverty reduction. It is tasked with 8 outputs:
 1. Agriculture production sector development
 2. Livestock and fishery sector development
 3. Rural small scale industry development
 4. Rural socio-economic development
 5. Rural cooperative development
 6. Rural energy development
 7. Environmental conservation
 8. Private microcredit-system development

- The constituent sectoral policies lack coherence and full integration from the point of view of achieving the overarching goals of food security, economic development, climate resilience and adaptation, and climate change mitigation through the promotion of CRSA.
- Although there are short-term 5-year plans and long-term plans in the agriculture, livestock and fishery sectors, some short-term plans are not reflective of the long-term vision.
- Accord due priority to the sustainable development of mountain regions surrounding the CDZ during the process of formulating CRSA policies and strategies for the CDZ, including the need to reduce the environmental risk to agriculture posed by activities in the mountain regions in CDZ.
- Create incentives to attract the private sector to invest in agriculture, including areas such as agro-processing for value addition, market development for traditional products and use of renewable resources.

A more detailed assessment is presented in the table 1.

4. Key recommendations

Policy-related recommendations

- Formulate an overarching, integrated National Sustainable Development (NSD) policy encompassing NEP, NSPARD and NCDP, with emphasis on agroecology zone-specific strategies to address locally appropriate adaptation and mitigation actions for CRSA in CDZ. An evidence base should be built to inform agroecological zone-specific action which can also contribute to the NSD policy.
- Identify and upscale local solutions in view of the vulnerability of the CDZ to low precipitation and soil degradation. Invest technical and financial resources in encouraging crop and livelihood diversification, value addition and post-harvest processing in the Dry Zone in order to positively impact incomes and livelihoods.

Institution-related recommendations

- Build the capacity of government staff at different levels to coordinate policy implementation across multiple policy areas, including rural development and poverty alleviation, and across different ministries and departments. Address capacity development for managing other developmental, institutional and financial issues.
- Empower regional and local governments to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies for supporting CRSA in CDZ, and ensure regional and local governments, civil society organizations, private sector and farmers' associations are adequately represented in relevant institutional frameworks.
- Strengthen coordination among research and extension services to promote CRSA in the Dry Zone, by engaging

Table 1. Key strengths and weaknesses of NEP, NCDP and NSPARD as policies, and their related institutions and process:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NEP was enacted as early as in 1995 and the National Commission for Environment Affairs was established in 1990 to protect the environment, including forest cover, climate change and conservation of biodiversity. ■ The National Adaptation Program for Action for Climate Change, which identifies agriculture as one of the important priority thematic areas, has been prepared. ■ In the NCDP, agriculture is well recognized as a key sector for enabling progress in other sectors in the National Development Plan. ■ NSPARD has been a key national strategy in view of the Government of the Union of Myanmar's (GoRUM) commitment to fulfilling MDG 1 to reduce poverty to 16 per cent by the end of 2015. GoRUM has obtained recognition from FAO in achieving this poverty reduction goal, which underscores the potential for further progress in this direction. 	<p>Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State and regional governments do not have the autonomy to initiate policy formulation; their role is to implement the policy laid down by the central government. ■ Although the CDZ suffers from unique constraints and problems, there is no CDZ-specific policy. ■ The environmental risk to agriculture posed by activities in the adjoining mountain regions in CDZ is not well recognized. ■ Smallholder-friendly agricultural credit mechanisms have not received enough attention to encourage CRSA technologies and practices. ■ There is inadequate emphasis on convergence and coherence of research, extension and education approaches. ■ Awareness of the existence and the role of NEP and National Environment Conservation Law at both operational and senior levels of government is unclear.
<p>Institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Department of Rural Development (DRD) was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MALI) in 2016 to achieve better coordination of work with other departments. ■ There is an Aid Effectiveness Coordination Forum with representatives of GoRUM, development partners, private sector, media, and civil society organizations for the implementation of NSPARD. ■ Cooperation of GoRUM with ASEAN and other countries, as well as with regional and international institutions, has been increasing; this supports policy formulation including in the area of CRSA. 	<p>Institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The departments concerned have not been able to establish the strong coordination necessary to achieve the interdisciplinary goals of CRSA. ■ Despite the existence of the Aid Effectiveness Coordination Forum, the coordination of the government with development partners, the private sector and NGOs is still in a nascent stage and constrained by existing mindsets and multi-layered departmental structures. ■ Directorates have insufficient capacity in terms of number of staff and expertise to deal adequately with rural development and poverty alleviation issues. Management capacities of the lead agencies at the township level are also inadequate. ■ Private sector associations such as UMFCCI, MRF and MPBSA² are not perceived as adequately representative of smallholders, which hinders engagement of smallholders through these institutions. ■ Farmer associations are not able to effectively influence or contribute to policies.
<p>Processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is expectation of increased transparency and accountability in governance after the recent transition in governance in 2016. ■ A substantial amount of development aid for CRSA has been mobilized through multilateral development agencies and other development partners; this supports existing policy efforts. ■ Some development partners and NGOs are promoting the use of a people-centred approach and participatory methods which supports stakeholder engagement in decision making. 	<p>Processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consultations with local stakeholders remain largely limited to specific project frameworks rather than part of structured political or policy processes. ■ An incentive plan for smallholder farmers to adopt climate-resilient technologies and practices has not been put in place. ■ There is no systematic mechanism to use the public budget to attract private spending.

local and international national NGOs, and the private sector to disseminate improved technologies to smallholder farmers. Moreover, involve local commodity exchange centres in value chain development of Dry Zone crops.

- Address the issue of insufficiency of extension staff in terms of quantity, quality and inaccessibility of extension services to smallholder farmers.
- Build a political platform for the development of interaction among enabling agencies, delivery agencies and user groups to utilize the farmer field school approach to empower farmers. Establish farmer associations and strengthen farmers' capacities to undertake advocacy and influence policy decisions.

Process-related recommendations

- Promote better, more structured coordination and cooperation among MALI, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, and other government stakeholders to leverage integrated natural resource management for better adaptation, resilience and mitigation of climate change. Foster cooperation, not only at the horizontal level between the regional and local authorities, but also at the vertical level with national institutions and Ministries.
- Support participatory approaches that involve grass-roots stakeholders in policy and programme formulation, monitoring and evaluation processes. Institutionalize

² Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF), Myanmar Pulses, Beans and Sesame Seeds Merchants Association (MPBSMA).

This publication has been developed under the project titled 'An Integrated Rural Economic and Social Development Programme for Livelihoods Improvement in the Dry Zone of Myanmar' led by CAPSA-ESCAP in partnership with the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT), Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM) and Network Activities Group. The Department of Rural Development of Myanmar is the focal government agency to collaborate in the implementation of the Project.

mechanisms to integrate outcomes of monitoring and evaluation in future policy and programmes design through effective coordination among various stakeholders. Enhance community participation in collecting information and knowledge through the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach.

- Undertake more intensive resource mobilization and pooling of funds by harnessing the government budget and other sources of finance, including the Evergreen Development Funds from DRD, loans from the Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank, development partners' funds and microfinance to meet the requirement of CRSA in CDZ, while taking into account needs of smallholder farmers. Simplify the mechanisms for local stakeholders to access financial resources and make them responsive to the needs of the CDZ.

Based on the recommendations, some proposals for follow-up activities that can lead to concrete action in support of CRSA in CDZ are as follows:

- Organize a workshop to promote coordination and exchange of experiences and lessons learned on CRSA among the three regions of the Dry Zone. Support the establishment of a Dry Zone region multi-stakeholder working group to transform the experiences and lesson learned from NSPARD into practical recommendations for CRSA in the CDZ.
- Establish a knowledge inventory centre as a hub for sharing the large amount of knowledge that is being generated about policy and programme implementation and impact among stakeholders.
- Set up a CDZ Commission for Sustainable Development with ministerial-level representatives from Mandalay, Magway and Sagaing regions. The Commission should have a consultative board

comprising representatives of local authorities, line departments, private sector and development partners. The board should be assigned the responsibility of drafting in a participatory manner and submitting a CRSA action plan for CDZ for approval to the Commission. After approval, the action plan can be submitted to the national level for endorsement and policy support. The Commission should have the authority to oversee implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

- Undertake a feasibility study for setting up a well-integrated value chain for pulses that has the township agriculture commodity exchange centre as a key stakeholder and involves farmers, traders, financial institutions, input suppliers and departmental personnel from the National Agriculture Research and Extension Services.
- Explore opportunities for tapping Global Environment Facility, UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol-linked funds for least developed countries, such as Myanmar, for adaptation projects in agriculture.

Selected references

- Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (CAPSA-ESCAP) (2016). Case Study: Policies, Institutions and Processes to Support Climate Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Myanmar's Dry Zone: Role of National Environment Policy, National Comprehensive Development Plan and National Strategy on Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development. Bogor, Indonesia.
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