

Asia - Pacific Association of
Agricultural Research
Institutions (APAARI)



STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2033



*"Strengthened research and
innovation systems for agriculture
and agri-food system
transformation in Asia and the
Pacific"*





APAARI's Strategic Plan 2024-2033

Strengthened research and innovation systems for agriculture and agri-food system transformation in Asia and the Pacific

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AARINENA	Near East and North Africa
AIS	Agricultural innovation systems
AFRIS	Agri-food research and innovation system
APAARI	Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions
CIRAD	French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FOs	Farmer organizations
GFAR	Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAAS	International Association for Agricultural Sustainability
MERL	Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning
NARS	National Agricultural Research System
NGO	Non-governmental organization
I-IGO	Quasi-Inter-Governmental Organization
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNFSS	United Nations Food Systems Summit
WOs	Women organizations

Foreword

The Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) was established in 1990. In 2016 it developed its first Strategic Plan 2017-2022, which highlighted the key pathways to strengthen agri-food research and innovation systems (AFRIS), to contribute towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Asia-Pacific Region by 2030. The Plan was well designed and ambitious, but the implementation was a significant challenge as the required budget was not available. Nevertheless, the APAARI Secretariat managed to secure project funding to achieve some important targets of the Plan.

The new Strategic Plan for 2024-2033 has been designed to guide APAARI's actions to better respond to the priorities and needs of its members, with a refined new Vision of 'Strengthened research and innovation systems for agriculture and agri-food system transformation in Asia and the Pacific'.

The Secretariat identified key areas of comparative advantage through a mid-term review of its Strategic Plan 2017-2022. It particularly assessed the ways it contributed to the achievement of some specific strategies outlined in the Plan. The comparative advantage provided the rationale for the definition and prioritization of the five strategic objectives of the new Strategic Plan 2024-2033, which was further validated and prioritized through a Member Survey.

Based on the outcomes of United Nations Food System Summit (2021) and the two stock-taking exercises thereafter, APAARI integrated the agri-food system approach in its Strategic Plan 2024-2033 to respond to the current and future agri-food challenges and multiple regional priorities more effectively.

Adopting an inclusive and structural process supported by the Executive Committee, the Secretariat constituted an Advisory Committee of ten APAARI members, chaired by Ms. Temina Lalani Sheriff, Regional Director, South Asia for CGIAR. The Committee was supported by APAARI members from Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, as well as regional, sub-regional and international organizations, including the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA), French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CI-RAD), International Association for Agricultural Sustainability (IAAS) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). APAARI greatly appreciates their strategic guidance on the matter.

The various steps involved in the preparation of this Strategic Plan included internal meetings among the Secretariat staff, meetings with the Advisory Committee members, inputs collected from APAARI members through regular engagement meetings, and a member survey. A new Theory of Change has been developed, which clearly outlines the strategic pathways for the implementation of the new Plan.

During the process of the Plan development, it was highlighted that to address the regional issues holistically, APAARI first requires to strengthen the Secretariat with en-

hanced resources to strengthen its engagement in the region. As such, greater engagement with the members, partners and other stakeholders will be at the centre of APAARI's operations during 2024-2033. This will take place at the three dimensions, namely: individual, organizational and the enabling environment, since they are inter-linked and addressing them together have shown to lead to greater impact.

The main engagement areas of APAARI's focus will be through strengthened knowledge management, policy advocacy, transformation of higher education, capacity development of agricultural innovation system, facilitation of collaboration and partnerships, membership engagement, and partner stewardship.

The successful implementation of the new Strategic Plan will indeed also depend on effective partnership and cooperation between APAARI, agri-food research and innovation organizations, and primary stakeholders as identified in the Plan. APAARI's core values of vision, excellence, learning and growing, inclusiveness and accountability, will continue to serve its members, partners and stakeholders, ensuring commitment to the highest level of professionalism to strengthen research and innovation systems for agriculture and agri-food system transformation in Asia and the Pacific.

The new legal status that APAARI is pursuing as a Quasi-Inter-Governmental Organization (Q-IGO) in Thailand is envisioned to leverage even more opportunities for partnerships and enhanced resources, capitalizing on a much stronger position in the region that the Association gained over the years. Therefore, I am confident that the continuous commitment to support the 2030 Development Agenda that APAARI has been demonstrating over the years, will make a difference in the Asia-Pacific region. The Strategic Plan 2024-2033 will guide these efforts.

I would like to take this unique opportunity to gratefully acknowledge and profoundly thank a diversity of individuals that worked under the guidance of Ms. Temina Lalani Sheriff and myself, and who provided their excellent inputs to the APAARI Secretariat. Sincere appreciation goes to Ms. Martina Spisiakova, Strategy and Innovation Coordinator, who led this strategic initiative to support the Secretariat in the development of the Plan, and who was actively engaged with the members to coordinate and refine various sections through rigorous consultations with stakeholders, Advisory Committee members, APAARI Secretariat staff and consultants.

I also thank profusely to all others also were involved directly or indirectly in the process of designing the APAARI Strategic Plan 2024-2033.

Dr. Ravi Khetarpal

Executive Director, APAARI

The need for transformation of agriculture and agri-food systems

Context

Countries all over the world have been doubling their efforts towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. However, these goals could not be achieved without transforming the world's food and agriculture systems to become more productive, environmentally sustainable, and able to deliver more nutritious, affordable food.

The Asia-Pacific region, for instance, which is the world's largest region with some vibrant economies, is still home to most hungry people, struggling in its efforts to achieve the SDGs. The '5F crisis' of lack of food, feed, fuel, fertilizer and finance has pushed millions more people of the region, including women and children, into hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Furthermore, climate change is resulting in increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events and detrimental changes to the Earth's water cycle that are largely affecting the region's agri-food systems.

Emerging trends in the agri-food system transformation

The commitments made at the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and the Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2021, which was further emphasized during the stocktaking exercise in 2022, provides an agreed framework for systemic change across agri-food systems. To accelerate the needed agri-food transformation, five key solutions were identified, that is, enabling policies and urban governance, improvement of agri-food processes, technology and innovation, transition from traditional to modern agricultural practices, and promotion of a healthy food environment¹.

Smarter policies

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), it is still possible to push agri-food systems along a pattern of sustainability and resilience, if key "triggers" of transformation are properly activated. However, strategic policy options to activate them will have to "outsmart" vested interests, hidden agendas and conflicting objectives, and trade off short-term unsustainable achievements for longer-term sustainability, resilience and inclusivity². The role of policies and regulations in driving the transformation is therefore crucial.

Enhancing the role of women as equal leaders in innovation

Women are integral to advancing agricultural and social transformation in Asia-Pacific, whether working as agricultural researchers, scientists, rural advisors, research and project managers or leaders, as well as producers and agri-entrepreneurs. The use of innovative concepts, approaches and tools has been at the centre of their research and extension work, but also at the grassroots level rural women often use innovative thinking to come up with coping strategies to address many issues they are facing. Nevertheless, women's significant contribution to the strengthening of agricultural innovation systems (AIS) has not always been fully recognized or equally valued. This is mainly due to the prevalent social norms in the mostly patriarchal and conservative socio-cultural environments in which they live and work. This has led to women within the AIS having limited capacities, insufficient access and confidence to enter management positions and influence

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14pnRfyVBEgB81FFOIKI0dFIjz-pj01mn/view>

innovation processes and inadequate mentoring and leadership support, along with many other challenges they face.³

Emergence of a new type of agricultural professionals

In Asia-Pacific, higher agricultural education is considered the backbone of national agricultural research and innovation systems. In the context of the dynamic, complex and rapidly changing world, many higher education institutions (HEIs) question whether their current agricultural programmes are adequately preparing youth with employability skills needed to respond to future needs of their employers, markets and society. Transformation in agricultural education is urgently needed to empower university students through entrepreneurial and agri-business education, experiential learning, co-research and co-innovation with farmers and other innovation actors, critical thinking, and ethical leadership.

Furthermore, new digital platforms and technologies are supporting the emergence of a new generation of farmers, further positioning young people as agents of change in agri-food systems transformation. Inclusive digital transformation of the region's agriculture holds an incredible potential to unlock employment opportunities especially for youth; improve agricultural production, productivity, and the management of natural resources; and bridge the rural divide that empowers youth and women to access information, technology, inputs and markets, all making agricultural value chains more efficient and inclusive.

The United Nations recognizes that no society can reach its full potential unless it empowers women and youth, and removes all obstacles to their full participation in all areas of human endeavour. As women and men bring different perspectives to problems, an enabling environment considering equal contribution of both men and women needs to be built in and mainstreamed in institutional processes and development programmes as an enabler of innovation.⁴

From local farms to global plates

The Asia-Pacific Regional Manifesto on Forgotten Food calls for an urgent change to the prevailing yield-for-immediate-profit structure of agriculture. Farmer organizations (FOs), women organizations (WOs), research, policy and advocacy institutions in Asia-Pacific are increasingly demanding more multi-functional diversified agri-food structure that includes neglected and underutilized crops or also called forgotten or smart foods to reap benefits for the planet, farmers and consumers. Such foods have been traditionally cultivated, yet, they have suffered the wrath of food consumption trends and eating habits. The industrialization of agriculture pushed them away from the global agricultural and research systems. Farmers, development professionals, scientists, and government officials now engage to bring these foods back to farms, into research and policy agendas, and from local farms to global plates. In addition to bringing a change in research systems and value chains to support food diversification and farmers' empowerment, investment in sustainable and suitable agricultural technologies, innovative processes for capacity development and advocacy for innovation will particularly reward small farmers and consumers in Asia-Pacific and beyond.⁵

In the context of this ongoing agricultural and agri-food transformation and related trends, pushing for sustainable pathways within the planetary boundaries with innovation at the centre is

³ <https://www.aesanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Asia-Pacific-women-in-research-and-extension-Advancing-gender-equality-in-innovation.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.aesanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Asia-Pacific-women-in-research-and-extension-Advancing-gender-equality-in-innovation.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.icrisat.org/a-manifesto-on-forgotten-foods-for-asia-pacific-with-farmers-in-focus/>

the key to APAARI's new Strategy 2024-2033. It articulates its contribution to the SDGs through supporting its member countries, and member and partner institutions in fulfilling their priorities relative to the 2030 Agenda.

The primary stakeholders benefiting from the strategy include the core members of APAARI, i.e. national agricultural research system (NARS), HEI and national governments that benefit from their improved technical, functional and institutional capacities, as well as strengthened partnerships, to bring about positive changes at organizational, institutional and policy levels. This will ultimately benefit small farmers and small producers in terms of their enhanced market participation, improved processes based on their inclusiveness, as well as more favourable regulations and policies to enable them to undertake their agricultural activities with dignity. Consumers will benefit from healthier and more nutritious food.

Supporting sustainable agriculture as the backbones of our society, the key drivers to enable APAARI to contribute to this transformation will focus on 'smarter' processes to produce nutritious food, ensure equitable access to healthy diets, minimize the production risks for small farmers as well as food safety risks for consumers, enable improved facilitation of agricultural trade through regulatory compliance, combined with improved processes for protecting the environment and climate change adaptation. The envisioned contribution of APAARI to this transformation will be done in an inclusive manner, with gender equality in the core of its operations.

About APAARI

APAARI is an apolitical, regional organization established by FAO in 1999. It is a vibrant innovation network of members and partners from national agricultural research systems (NARS), including HEIs; alliance of rural advisory services, international agricultural research centres, civil society of farmer and women organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. Based in Bangkok, Thailand, the APAARI Secretariat plays a key role in the facilitation and mobilization of its members and partners in Asia-Pacific and beyond to participate in collaborative actions. APAARI is also a knowledge broker that works as a Community. On the one hand, it capitalizes on the strengths of its members and partners, and on the other, develops their capacities to collectively deliver the results needed to contribute to the achievement of the APAARI Vision and ultimately the SDGs.

Key stakeholders

- **Core members:** NARS, HEIs
- **Development partners:** The rural advisory services alliance, civil society (NGOs, FOs, WOs), the private sector, global international agricultural research institutions and United Nations, and sub-regional bodies
- **Donors:** National, regional and global
- **Others:** Potential members of APAARI

Vision

Strengthened research and innovation systems for agriculture and agri-food system transformation in Asia and the Pacific

Mission

Strengthening partnership in research and innovation through facilitation of knowledge management, collaboration, capacity development, policy and advocacy

APAARI's comparative advantage within the agri-food system transformation

To respond to the current and future agri-food challenges and multiple priorities more effectively, APAARI integrates the agri-food system approach in its Strategic Plan 2024-2033. In terms of 'agri' aspects of the system, it includes agronomical processes and practices in production (e.g. agroecology, climate-smart agriculture, environmental health, and livestock and fisheries), agricultural value and supply chains, and promotion and conservation of biodiversity. The 'food' aspects include the production of nutritional food, processing and storage, food and fertilizer subsidies, as well as the availability, access, safety, quality and economy of food. Both aspects will be covered by enhancing safer agri-food trade.

The system approach allows APAARI to deliver on its Vision, Mission and Strategy by focusing on the four technical areas of its comparative advantage, as follows:

1. Risk mitigation and environmental protection
2. Conservation and utilization of bioresources and agroecology
3. Enhancement of the use of appropriate innovative technologies and processes
4. Inclusive development approaches for livelihoods and market access

APAARI identified these areas of comparative advantage through the mid-term review of its Strategic Plan 2017-2022, based on the ways it contributed to the achievement of some specific strategies outlined in the Plan, mostly through specific project funding. The comparative advantage was further validated and priorities through a Member Survey and the Advisory Committee on the development of the new Strategic Plan. Hence, this comparative advantage provides the rationale for the definition and prioritization of the five strategic objectives of the new Strategic Plan.

Strategic objectives

In the context of these four areas of APAARI's comparative advantage, the APAARI Strategic Plan 2024-2033 sets out how it will work in the next ten years to play a crucial role in the sustainable agri-food transformation of the Asia-Pacific region, **to achieve food and nutritional security of all.**

The Strategic Plan 2024-2033 sets the five tentative strategic objectives that fall under the four areas of APAARI's comparative advantage and added value. As a knowledge broker and an innovation platform, these specific contributions of APAARI are based on its unique position to facilitate knowledge management (KM), partnerships, and capacity development towards inclusive scaling up of innovation, while capitalizing on the strengths of members and partners to collectively contribute to the APAARI Vision and the SDGs.

Through this value proposition, APAARI will be guided by five Strategic Objectives aiming to **strengthen:**

1. agricultural production and productivity for more sustainable farming systems, such as agroecology
2. local value chains for healthy and nutritious crops
3. development and use of appropriate innovative technologies and processes for making agri-food systems more effective
4. countries' compliances to agri-food trade norms for enhanced export and import
5. countries' attention towards agrobiodiversity, climate resilience and environmental sustainability through innovation actions that benefit the planet

The objectives are framed to strengthen APAARI's contribution to the mission of national, regional and international agricultural research institutions (e.g. the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, CGIAR) creating real, lasting and positive impact in climate adaptation and mitigation; environmental health and biodiversity; gender equality, youth and social inclusion; nutrition, health and food security; and poverty reduction, livelihoods and jobs.

Based on the five Strategic Objectives, APAARI operates through five Intervention Packages.

Intervention packages

Strategic objectives	Result statements
1) Strengthened agricultural production and productivity for more sustainable farming systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased adoption, production and consumption of neglected and underutilized species (forgotten or smart crops), as well as fisheries and livestock Improved adoption agroecological practices Improved engagement of innovation actors, including farmers and researchers in co-research and co-innovation Improved availability of nutritious and healthy food for consumers
2) Strengthened local value chains for healthy and nutritious crops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved knowledge and skills of the innovation actors to engage in the value chains Improved availability of quality seeds Improved post-harvest and processing management Increased development of women-led innovative family businesses Improved engagement and leadership of youth in agri-businesses and rural entrepreneurship Increased engagement of citizens in urban and peri-urban agriculture
3) Strengthened development and use of appropriate innovative technologies and processes for making agri-food systems more effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved integration of digitalization in agricultural value chains and business processes (e.g. internet of things, artificial intelligence, information and communication technologies) Improved management and use of agrobiotechnology (genebank, genome editing, germplasm and tissue culture) Improved crop varieties and livestock Strengthened technology transfer, engagement of the private sector, and broad-scale adoption
4) Strengthened countries' compliances to agri-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved cross-border trade for food, crops and seeds Improved biosafety and biosecurity through appropriate pest management practices

food trade norms for enhanced export and import	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved food safety through technical compliances • Enhanced production, use and perception of biopesticides • Harmonized policies to facilitate trade • Evidence-based policies and practices
5) Enhanced countries' attention towards agrobiodiversity, climate resilience and environmental sustainability through innovation actions that benefit the planet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved adoption of climate-smart agricultural processes to enhance climate resilience • Improved policies to support agrobiodiversity, climate change mitigation and environmental sustainability • Mitigated risks of climate change and unforeseen crisis

Engagement approaches

To deliver on these Strategic Objectives, APAARI will work smarter and from the AIS perspective that encompasses the important roles that all innovation actors, including farmers, women and youth, play in sustainable agri-food transformation. Through this inclusive innovation process, APAARI will deliver the five Strategic Objectives through its key principles of engagement based on the five functional areas of comparative advantage as follows:

1. **Knowledge management**, which will include: enhancing documentation and sharing of good practices; mainstreaming co-research and co-innovation with multi-actors (with farmers at the centre) into national research and innovation processes; promotion of effectiveness in innovation processes through digitalization; and monitoring of APAARI's contribution towards agri-food transformation and the SDGs.
2. **Policy advocacy**, which will include: fostering enabling policy and regulatory frameworks for food and agriculture; promoting evidence-based policies and practices to support highly productive agricultural sectors, i.e. crops, livestock, forestry, and fisheries; advocating smarter investments to support institutional strategic change processes towards agri-food transformation; supporting the integration of the AIS perspective in national strategies, based on inclusiveness and evidence-based policy dialogue.
3. **Transformation of higher education**, which will include: integration of experiential learning, entrepreneurship and ethical leadership in education; innovating curricula with integration of co-research and co-innovation based on multi-actor collaboration, and institutional development focused on mainstreaming the enhancement of functional capacities in technical subjects that make agricultural education more responsive to the realities of the dynamic agri-food system, and create graduates as more active agents of change.
4. **Capacity development for agricultural innovation systems (AIS)**, which will include: the blending of technical and functional capacities that bring about more systemic implications on the needed change for the transformation of agri-food systems. The development and mobilization of technical expertise of national and regional stakeholders in the five key strategic areas will be blended with integration of the development of functional capacities for innovation (soft skills) at individual, organizational and enabling environment level).

5. **Facilitation of collaboration, partnerships, and partner stewardship** with national, regional, sub-regional⁶ and international stakeholders is based on key partnership principles aiming to ensure inclusiveness and ethical contributions of all partners to enhance the regional innovation ecosystems and food security in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, particularly through South-South and North-South Cooperation for innovation.
6. **Membership engagement** to facilitate the Members' participation in regional projects and capacity assessments, keep them abreast of burning regional issues, support them in regional knowledge sharing and learning, and enable their participation in inter-regional exchanges based on their countries' priorities and needs.
7. **New membership development and engagement** of the Pacific sub-region as a special membership group with which APAARI aims to strengthen its partnerships and engagement. This is particularly in the areas of capacity development in research and innovation, facilitation of partnership development in the areas of mutual interest, regional cooperation programmes, and other where APAARI can provide additional value to countries, such as Fiji. This would differ based on the different needs of the countries in the Pacific.

APAARI's key partnership principles

1. All partnerships share the common vision defined by APAARI, and the goal of contributing to the SDGs.
2. Knowledge networks of partnerships are based on transparency, accessibility of information, commitment to mutual learning and sharing knowledge, and mutual peer-to-peer knowledge support.
3. Responsibilities of partnerships are defined based on partners' comparative advantage, negotiated, shared, acknowledged and respected.
4. Collective capacities for innovation are enhanced through partnerships and applied in various institutional contexts.
5. All results of innovation partnerships are supported by evidence, and widely disseminated to benefit agri-food system stakeholders, relevant contexts, and societies.

Note: Adapted from the Partnership Principles of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR)

Strengthening of the APAARI Secretariat

To effectively implement the Strategic Plan, and monitor and assess the impact pathways, APAARI will be working **smarter** by:

- delivering smarter processes and innovative actions to its members in more cost-effective ways;
- mobilizing and leveraging greater project funding primarily to benefit the members;
- nurturing the existing and engaging in new strategic partnerships, as well as facilitating networking to enable the members to strategically engage in the region;
- streamlining operational and administrative processes and sharpening its efficiency in line with the smarter ways of delivering on the Strategic Objectives;

⁶ South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific

- facilitating synergies of regional operations to maximise their relevance and importance to the members, in line with their national strategies, programmes and innovation actions;
- managing internal risks and accountability through sound risk management tools and processes to enable the Secretariat to address issues timely and efficiently as they arise

The Theory of Change

The APAARI's Theory of Change starts from the fundamental problem of weak enabling environment to support sustainable agriculture and agri-food transformation. To address the problem, APAARI first requires a strengthened Secretariat to better facilitate its regional and global network of members, partners and other stakeholders. Through the key engagement areas, including KM; capacity development; facilitation of collaboration, partnerships and partner stewardship; transformation of higher education; new membership development and engagement; current membership engagement; and policy advocacy, APAARI will work towards its desired outputs, short-term and long-term outcomes, and the expected impact pathways. The engagement areas will be addressed at the three dimensions, namely: individual, organizational and enabling environment. (ref. Annex for details)

Alignment with global development frameworks

APAARI has fully institutionalized the Common Framework on Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems of the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP)⁷, which is used as a guiding framework in APAARI's activities and projects. The Framework guides the development of national capacities for agricultural innovation to better meet the demands of small farmers, small and medium-sized agribusiness and consumers. To achieve this goal, APAARI has institutionalized the Framework and developed a unique model of blending technical and functional capacities for innovation, while promoting the AIS perspective to enable better coherence and greater impact of capacity development activities on national AIS, and ultimately Asia-Pacific agri-food systems.

Performance assessment and monitoring

The Theory of Change will provide an overall guiding framework to implement and assess the Strategic Plan through a sound monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning (MERL) system. This will be the basis for yearly reporting and the development of Annual Work Plans related to APAARI's technical and functional areas. The Work Plans will be project and budget specific, and will include detailed performance frameworks with expected outcomes, indicators, and timelines.

⁷ The Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP) was initiated by the G20 and it is hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organizations of the United Nations (FAO)

Annex: The Theory of Change

