Policy Synthesis

Symposium on

Climate Change Policy System in Southeast Asia- From Research to Policy Actions Towards Sustainable Food Systems

18 March 2023

The 11th Asian Society of Agricultural Economists International Conference

Symposium: Climate Change Policy System in Southeast Asia- From Research to Policy Actions Towards Sustainable Food Systems

Background

To achieve long-term food system transformation in Asia in the face of climate change, applied economists must address critical research questions concerning the economic impacts of agricultural investment, the adoption of appropriate technologies, outreach and extension programmes, and so on. However, translating research findings into evidence-based policy change is critical. Understanding the policy process is critical for this translation, as is conducting policy research at various stages of the process to achieve impact.

To achieve policy impacts, it is critical to understand research pathways and instruments for policy formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. Researchers can generate evidence for policy solutions, investigate factors influencing policy implementation, and evaluate policy impacts and sustainability. Understanding the complex and dynamic policy process can assist researchers in asking pertinent questions and using research tools to promote effective policy implementation and dissemination. Understanding the challenges faced by multiple actors from various disciplines and geographies is critical, as is using case scenarios to gain insights from multiple contexts.

The Symposium

The symposium on climate change policy system in Southeast Asia- from research to policy actions towards sustainable food systems was jointly organized by Kasetsart University (Thailand), Michigan State University (USA), International Food Policy Research Institute (USA) Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (Indonesia), Agricultural Economics Society of Thailand Under Royal Patronage (Thailand), and the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (Thailand) at the 11th Asian Society of Agricultural Economists International Conference on 18 March 2023. The symposium brought together experts from across the Asia-Pacific region to share knowledge and experiences and develop a roadmap for policymakers and researchers to navigate the challenges of climate change in the food system and examine case scenarios for deeper insights and context building.

The aim was to identify types of policy systems and processes in place in Southeast Asia at the national and regional levels, as well as how they influence research uptake into policy formulation and implementation; identify policy research and outreach approaches that ensure better policy uptake from research; and, establish a network of policy researchers, analysts, and experts who understand the policy process and can provide high-quality research evidence for policy translation and impact.

The panel discussion was chaired by Sutkhet Nakasathien, Vice-president of Research and Creation, Kasetsart University. It included panelists Suresh Babu, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Witsanu Attavanich, Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics, Kasetsart University, Nafees Meah, Asia Representative, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Venkatachalam Anbumozhi, Director- Research Strategy and Innovations, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, and Imelda Bacudo, Convenor, ASEAN CRN and ANGA as well as Co-Chair, Global Alliance on Climate Smart Agriculture. The discussion was moderated by Orachos Napasintuwong, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics, Kasetsart University, with Duncan Boughton, Department of Agricultural, Food and Resource Economics, Michigan State University as rapporteur.

The session was run on March 18, 2023 at the 11th Asian Society of Agricultural Economists International Conference via zoom webinar and on-site at Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan. There were 55 online participants and 32 on-site participants, mostly from Asia.

Key Messages

1. Policies play a crucial role in achieving sustainable and equitable food systems, particularly given the scale of externalities generated by Agri-food systems and the large number of public subsidies involved.
2. Policy systems for climate change in Southeast Asia are complex and involve multiple stakeholders, requiring intentional strategies for coordination at each level of governance, from local to global.
3. Policy systems often struggle with inertia due to this complexity, as well as information uncertainty and conflicting incentives. Hence, flagship events like COP can provide a framework to align global and local processes.
4. Social science research has a critical role to play in bridging biological sciences and agricultural stakeholders such as farmers, agribusinesses, and consumers, as well as between research users and policymakers who can shape incentives.
5. Social science research capacity for sustainable food systems is limited, given the urgency and complexity of the problem. Collaboration between social scientists working on OneCGIAR initiatives and those in country-level universities and research institutes or think tanks could help make bridges with local policy systems more systematic and effective, and break down silos.

Policy to Action: Analyzing gaps and resources

The gaps in policy systems

Policy research must evaluate the following constraints in the policy system to achieve sustainable and equitable food systems:

1. Ignorance: Policymakers may not fully understand the role of agriculture in climate change and are unwilling to commit to reducing agricultural emissions due to uncertainty. The voice of food producers in the policy process is often missing. They need to be proactively brought into the policy design process.
2. Indifference: Policymakers may lack incentives to take action on farmer incentives for Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) since the impacts may not be seen during their political careers.
3. Intransigence: Policymakers may oppose changes to the policy system due to concerns over political constituencies.
4. Inadequate access: Policymakers may lack technical expertise, financial resources, and channels to access policy research to formulate better policy options.
5. No mutual benefits: Policymakers may refuse to use the research findings, which are not matched with their needs, and there are no mutual benefits generated to stakeholders across food system.
6. Lack of research credibility: Policymakers may refuse to use the research findings due to the quality of the research, limitation of the application, and the lack of a comprehensive view from various dimensions.
7. Unfavorable regulations: Policymakers may ignore policy research due to unfavorable laws and regulations.

However, the greatest challenge remains that the impact of national reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture is minimal compared to global emissions. Even with correct policy implementation, larger agricultural greenhouse gas emitters could easily undermine efforts, creating a "tragedy of the commons."

Resources for Improving Uptake of Research Findings

Despite the challenges, social science research can be harnessed to improve the uptake of findings by utilizing resources such as information, advocacy, leadership, and organizational innovation.

1. Information: Providing policymakers with more holistic, reliable and actionable solutions, combined with better communication tools, can increase the uptake of research findings. This may involve synthesizing research in a way that is easily understood and highlighting the most relevant and applicable findings.
2. Advocacy: Teaming up with effective civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector can be a powerful way to influence policy change. By aligning with stakeholders in

policy outcomes, researchers can increase the visibility of their findings and build momentum for policy change.
3. Leadership: Building relationships between science and champions in the policy arena and the private sector can help to bridge the gap between research and action. By identifying and working with leaders committed to evidence-based policy-making, researchers can increase the likelihood that their findings will be acted upon.
4. Organizational innovation: Breaking down silos within and between different actors and stakeholders and remove unfavorable laws and regulations can help to create a more conducive environment for policy change. This may involve working across disciplines or sectors, or finding ways to collaborate more effectively with different actors.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of these resources is underpinned by the need for collective action at every level of governance, from international negotiations to local actions. By working together, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders can create the conditions for more effective and sustainable policy change.

Conclusion

The presenters and panelists have demonstrated, through various case scenarios, that social science researchers have important roles to play in each resource area. Given Southeast Asia's limited social science capacity resources, strengthened networks between social scientists in the OneCGIAR system, social scientists in universities across the region and their partnerships, and evidence-based advocacy networks like the ASEAN climate resilience network have a high potential return. The symposium was a significant step towards that goal.

Organized by