SAFANS: The South Asia Food And Nutrition Security Initiative

A Multi-Donor Trust Fund Initiative

*The availability and access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life remains a key challenge in South Asia. Addressing this problem of food and nutrition security requires action on multiple fronts both within countries and across the region. The South Asia Food And Nutrition Security (SAFANS) Initiative aims to promote food and nutrition security in the region by adopting a multi-sectoral approach in which issues of availability, access and utilization of food will be addressed with a view to impact nutritional outcomes. A three-pronged approach will be undertaken to achieve this objective: (i) improved evidence and analysis on the most effective ways to achieve food and nutrition security (FNS) outcomes in South Asia; (ii) improved awareness of FNS-related challenges, and advocacy for action, amongst relevant stakeholders; and (iii) strengthened regional and in-country policy and programming capacity to achieve FNS outcomes. An expected outcome of this initiative is increased commitment of governments and development partners in the region towards more effective and integrated policies and increased investments in food availability, safety nets and nutrition, as well as more emphasis on these issues in development plans and country strategies.*

# 1. Malnutrition is Pervasive and Persistent in South Asia

1. Ending poverty and hungeris MDG 1, yet today, South Asia still has around 23% of people – 336 million – who are routinely hungry; that is, they do not have daily access to adequate calories (FAO 2009).[[1]](#footnote-1) India, for example, ranks 66 (out of 88) on the Global Hunger Index. These figures, however, underestimate the true extent of food and nutrition insecurity, which includes hidden hunger—micronutrient deficiencies that, beyond calories, limit potential for active. and healthy lives. Despite remarkable progress in increasing aggregate food production, significant constraints to availability of food remain at the ground level for the poor and marginalized groups of the population. Regionally, slowing agricultural growth, inefficient markets and restrictive trade practices are adding to a sense of food insecurity. Climate change is also expected to adversely affect food production, especially in rain-fed areas which are also relatively poorer
2. Exacerbating the problem of food security are the widening income inequalities in the region. A critical concern in this regard is that the large numbers of extremely poor and most vulnerable households, who are unable to afford food, also do not have access to adequate safety nets. Hence, they disproportionately bear the burden of hunger and food insecurity. The overall coverage of safety net programs in the region is low and much lower than in other developing countries. Inefficient targeting and management of these programs also limit their potential in mitigating the adverse effects of extreme poverty and shocks on FNS outcomes.
3. It is therefore not surprising that the South Asia Region (SAR) has the highest rates of malnutrition as well as the largest numbers of malnourished children in the world[[2]](#footnote-2). No country in the region is on track to meet the MDG 1 target for nutrition. The prevalence of malnutrition in South Asia, estimated at over 46% of children in the age band 0-5 years, is much higher than in Sub-Saharan Africa (26%)**;** the rates in Bangladesh and India are almost double those of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nepal are among the 36 countries in the world which account for 90% of the global malnutrition burden. The malnutrition crisis in South Asia is also a significant problem among women of reproductive age. The World Health Organization’s global database on Body Mass Indices estimates that over a third of adult women in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are underweight, and the prevalence of iron deficiency anemia ranges between 55% and 81% across the region. Besides threatening their own health and productivity, malnourished women have an increased likelihood of adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes, delivering babies with low birth weight who are, in turn, more likely to grow up to be underweight or stunted children/adolescents.
4. The disadvantaged role of women in SAR is also a major obstacle to the progress on FNS issues.[[3]](#footnote-3) Women lack decision making power and choice within the household. Their mobility, ownership and access to food, is severely constrained and they typically do not control household or community resources. Within the system, there seems to be little pressure to change the *status quo* or to challenge unequal gender relations. For instance, insufficient attention is paid to the role of women in agriculture and the constraints they face in terms of accessing credit, inputs, information and training. This is a serious problem, given the trend towards ‘feminisation’ of agriculture in many rural areas, as men migrate in search of more remunerative work in cities. Few safety net programs address the need to mainstream gender in the design of the programs in order to improve women’s access to food.
5. ***The “South Asian Enigma”***: A remarkable aspect of the food insecurity and malnutrition problem in SAR, with implications for design of this Initiative, is its persistence despite economic growth. The term Asian Enigma, coined in the mid-90s, refers to the puzzle that economic growth in the region has not translated into FNS for the population at large, as observed in case of other developing countries (e.g., Thailand). Economic growth, for instance, has only had marginal positive correlation with improved nutritional status. In India there are “Puzzle States” such as Gujarat, Kerala and Punjab where, despite high agricultural growth and high literacy rates, high malnutrition (malnutrition can mean under-nutrition, over-nutrition obesity, vitamin deficiency, iron deficiency, calcium deficiency and iodine deficiency, but in this note, the term refers to under-nutrition and all forms of micronutrient deficiencies) rates persist. At the household level, adequate income also does not guarantee adequate nutrition; even among the richest quintile in India, 64% of preschool children are iron deficient and 26% are underweight.
6. Bangladesh illustrates clearly how weak the link is between FNS and economic growth/ poverty reduction in the South Asia region. During the first seven years of this decade, wasting levels, an indicator for acute malnutrition, have increased steadily. In 2007, the prevalence of wasting was reported at an emergency level of over 16%, higher than the international crisis threshold of 15% defined by the World Health Organization. In the same period, however, Bangladesh experienced no disasters, was self sufficient in rice production (often erroneously equated with food security) and poverty fell by 9 percentage points.
7. The vast and seemingly intractable problem of food insecurity and malnutrition is drawing political attention, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh calling it a “curse that we must remove”.[[4]](#footnote-4) Other leaders in the Region have also expressed similar serious concern about the effects of sharp rise in food prices on the poorer sections of the population.

# 2. Addressing the Food and Nutrition Security Challenge

1. The design of SAFNSI is informed by the following analysis of the key challenges in securing sustainable food and nutrition security outcomes.

## South Asia needs a multi-sector approach to food availability, safety nets, and nutrition

*To stem the tide of malnutrition and its effects, policies and investments in agriculture, rural development, education, health, early childhood development, gender, water and sanitation, and social protection must incorporate food and nutrition security issues and goals.*

1. Achieving sustainable food and nutrition security is fundamentally a multi-sectoral cross-cutting challenge. The food security objective has been defined by FAO (World Food Summit, 1996) as:

*All people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food according to their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.*

1. Operationally, three conditions need to be met to sustainably attain this objective: sufficient ***availability*** of food; adequate (and stable) ***access*** to food; and effective ***utilization*** of food. These require actions across a number of different sectoral or thematic fronts.
2. ***Food Availability***. To increase the availability supply of food, countries in South Asia will need to reverse the trend of declining productivity. In particular, agricultural research will need to focus on developing new varieties that can withstand the adverse effects of climate change on productivity and that deliver better nutrition than current varieties. South Asian countries need to move away from a narrow focus on self-sufficiency and take into account their respective comparative advantages, particularly in today’s context of increasing globalization. This will, of course, require close cooperation at the political level between SAARC countries. Besides increasing food production, emphasis must be laid on reducing food waste. To this end, integrated harvest management and integrated storage and transportation strategies need to be developed.
3. ***Food Access*.** Economic access to food supplies is a crucial aspect of food security. History shows that, at most times, there has always been enough food to feed the entire world population. However, income inequalities make economic access to food iniquitous. Although most South Asian countries have distribution schemes aimed at reducing such inequities, there are still significant gaps in providing effective and adequate social safety nets for the poor and the vulnerable. These need to be strengthened, primarily by sharpening the identification of beneficiaries to weed out those who are ineligible for distributive relief and developing effective safety systems that can respond to the needs of those who are vulnerable to various food-related and other types of shocks. The food price crisis of 2008 is a case in point. Further, other social protection measures to improve the asset endowment of the poor, improve market access to producers and the creation of more non-farm employment opportunities in rural areas are some of the measures that need to be taken up.
4. ***Food Utilization*.** In most countries, concerns about adequacy of food intake have tended to revolve round a daily minimum calorie intake. Few attempts are made to go beyond this and assess the nutritional adequacy of diets to ensure good health and reduce morbidity rates. Food security programs in the South Asian region need to move away from the calorie intake-based measures of adequacy and towards nutrient-based measures and programs that address nutritional deficiencies, such as poor nutritional knowledge and behavior (e.g., on exclusive breastfeeding and weaning foods); poor water and sanitation, and inadequate health services. This would require linking health, food security and other sector programs with a concomitant increase in the expenditure especially on health care.
5. In addition, the populations of hilly areas and areas that see frequent conflicts and regular natural disasters have been observed to be amongst the most vulnerable in terms of food security. While food security in areas prone to conflict requires greater peace efforts, disaster management policies need to be devised to mitigate the impact of natural disasters, and the range of related challenges posed by climate change. It is also necessary to tackle social issues that affect FNS through social interventions. Imparting nutritional education, particularly among women, apart from introducing schemes that enhance the access that women, children and other vulnerable groups have to food, are measures that will help ensure greater food security.
6. Despite the evident need for coordinated action on a number of fronts[[5]](#footnote-5), countries in South Asia generally do not follow a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensure sound FNS outcomes. More often countries have a range of government ministries responsible for tackling different aspects of the FNS problem with little incentive to coordinate and work with each other (e.g. trade, foreign exchange, employment, gender, agriculture, health and social welfare). Such a fragmented approach results in haphazard and disjointed efforts towards fighting hunger and malnutrition. Investment support from development partners are also organized along sectoral lines and thereby fail to promote a coordinated, cross-ministry strategy.
7. For example, agricultural and rural programs focus on sectoral objectives such as rural incomes, crop productivity, water-use efficiency, and so on. However, as evidence from the “Puzzle States” in India show, better agricultural performance alone is not *sufficient* to improve nutritional outcomes and related FNS objectives.[[6]](#footnote-6) On the other hand, evidence on the ground also shows that “connected interventions” - for instance, homestead food production interventions, or safety nets targeted at the poor with a nutrition education condition – are powerful ways to generate FNS outcomes. In short, policies and programmes need to better focus on the aim of sustainable improvement in nutrition outcomes across sectors. Experience in countries such as China, Vietnam and Thailand shows that under-nutrition rates can be substantially reduced if comprehensive action is taken to address food availability, food access and targeted improvements in health, nutrition practices (e.g., breast feeding; micronutrients) and drinking water quality and sanitation.

## Stronger articulation of demand for FNS-related outcomes is needed

*It is critically important to use evidence-based analysis and advocacy to encourage and influence governments to move FNS higher on the development agenda. Development partners also need to agree on, and robustly promote, a common FNS agenda.*

1. Despite the vast extent and grave severity of the FNS problem, it has not received the requisite support and commitment from governments and development partners for many reasons.[[7]](#footnote-7)
2. **Lack of visibility.** Malnutrition is usually “invisible” to malnourished families and communities. Caregivers often cannot tell when their children are becoming malnourished because unhealthy growth rates cannot be detected with the naked eye. Moreover, micronutrient deficiencies, unless they are severe enough to exhibit clinical symptoms, are impossible to detect without biochemical or clinical tests.
3. **Lack of understanding.** Families and communities do not recognize the human and economic costs of malnutrition—e.g., they are unaware that even moderate to mild malnutrition can contribute substantially to death, disease, and low intelligence.
4. **Lack of voice.** Many of the malnourished are poor, marginalized people with low, variable incomes that are inadequate to meet their basic needs, and they have little political voice to demand change.
5. **Program fatigue**. Invariably, neither nutrition security nor effective safety nets are high on the agenda of governments (with typically stretched budgets and competing priorities), leading to under-investment which, in turn, leads to weak impact, reinforcing the general belief that nutritional programs do not work.[[8]](#footnote-8)
6. **Political economy**. Underlying the fractured institutional response to FNS are competing interests and priorities within and between government, non-state actors, and development partners. There are limited incentives for regional inter-governmental economic and political cooperation on the regional dimensions of food security (e.g. trade barriers; common norms and standards). Understanding the political economy and the incentives or disincentives for uptake of evidence-based FNS policy by key interest groups is critical.

## Governments and development partners have been less engaged than desirable

*It is vitally important to support a process whereby governments and partners can re-focus their development strategies on FNS, develop a common agenda, and design appropriately balanced action plans to achieve FNS outcomes which can become part of national plans, PRSPs/PRSCs, country assistance strategies, sector wide approaches, and so on.*

1. Support from governments, donors, and other development partners has waned because most do not explicitly recognize that inadequate investment in FNS slows economic growth and perpetuate poverty in three ways:
2. direct losses in productivity from poor physical status;
3. indirect losses from poor cognitive function and deficits in schooling; and
4. losses arising from increased health care costs.
5. Productivity losses to individuals from malnutrition are estimated at more that 10 percent of lifetime earnings. Potential GDP loss estimates are sometimes as high as between 2 to 3 percent.
6. These actors are also insufficiently aware that failure to implement adequate safety nets programs for vulnerable populations—which prevent their slide into deeper poverty—perpetuates inter-generational poverty through child malnutrition and reduced expenditure on schooling. They may not know that there are cost-effective opportunities to address some malnutrition problems. Some targeted nutrition interventions appear to have benefit-cost ratios in range of 5 to 200, yet they still lack sponsors.
7. There is not always consensus about how to intervene against malnutrition—e.g., how to design and implement policies and programs that effectively address the indirect and direct drivers of under-nutrition. As there are multiple organizational stakeholders (i.e. departments, non state actors, donors, researchers) involved in addressing FNS, accountability for results and outcomes can “fall between the cracks”; interfacing and coordination creates additional transaction costs and processes which can delay action.
8. Knowledge about successful, innovative approaches on the ground may not filter up, or be communicated effectively, to key policy and decision makers.

## Lack of capacity impedes progress on FNS outcomes

*Any revitalized agenda for better FNS outcomes must include appropriate capacity building efforts—including guidelines and instruments for assessing institutional capacity and identifying best practices for multi-sectoral institutional arrangements in different country scenarios. Efforts should complement and avoid cutting across existing country activities and focus where value can be added.*

1. The shortage of institutional and human resource capacity is known to be a major constraint to the design and implementation of better safety nets, nutrition, and other FNS-related programs. Given the intrinsically cross-sectoral and cross-cutting nature of FNS interventions, staff in government and development agencies must to widen their perspectives and their skills sets. Implementers need to be aware of and then understand how to design and implement alternative institutional and human resource options for the management and delivery of FNS services. Programs also need better capacity to strategically monitor and evaluate interventions in a way that rapidly feeds results to decision-makers for accurate planning and program implementation.
2. The need for country policymakers and development partners to better understand the political economy of specific policy agendas including the range of state and non-state interests and their incentives/disincentives for uptake of evidence based approaches; and how to design processes and programs to engage effectively with these.
3. It is equally important to build the capacity of end beneficiaries of such interventions i.e., the poor, vulnerable and voice-less sections of the society, with the active support of civil society partners, to raise their awareness and capacities to participate in public FNS-related programs in a way that improves their quality (e.g., reduced corruption/leakage and better targeting due to community monitoring).

## Progress on FNS outcomes requires including the excluded, especially women

1. Overcoming gender inequality is a significant goal that can make a lasting contribution to reducing hunger, but its role has not received sufficient attention. Women have the central role in the household—growing, buying, and preparing food; accessing health care; early childhood development; etc. Moreover, they are responsible for a substantial portion of global food production. However in South Asia, women typically tend to have less control over household resources, tighter time constraints, less access to information and health services, and less voice. Their lack of power and choice in the household impairs their abilities to make decisions about their children’s health, nutrition, and education, and also prevents them from accessing the services they need to protect their own health, nutrition, and survival. This, in turn, affects their children’s birth weights, development, and the kind of care they receive.
2. A recent study found that the relationship between women’s status—defined as a woman’s relative power within the household and community—and children’s nutrition and development in South Asia, Sub-Sahara Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean is strongly correlated both the long- and short-term. An investment in a mother helps the mother but also leads to less stunting and wasting in her children.[[9]](#footnote-9) South Asian women, particularly poor women, appear to work under more constraints than women in other regions of the world. Their lack of freedom limits opportunities for interaction even with other women, which restricts transmission of new knowledge about hunger, nutrition, and child care. Figure 1 below illustrates the gender dimensions of malnutrition in South Asia. Women in South Asian households eat last, eat least, and typically what is left over, which is the least nutritious food. Despite this overwhelming evidence, there appears to be little pressure from within the system to change the status quo or to challenge unequal gender relations.
3. Social exclusion also impacts FNS outcomes through institutionalized discrimination and self-exclusion in various ways.
4. discrimination on the basis of caste and community in the provision of nutrition services;
5. self exclusion—marginalized communities drop-out of services as they perceive nutrition workers as uninterested and insensitive to their needs; and
6. a feeling of powerlessness among socially excluded groups to demand better services from nutrition workers.
7. Systematically addressing gender inequality and social exclusion issues is a key condition for sustained improvements in food and nutrition security in the region.

Figure 1 Gender at the focus of a cycle of malnutrition and poverty

# 3. What is SAFANS and How Can It Help?

1. SAFANS is a three-year initiative which aims to build on the efforts of governments and development partners to date and contribute directly to achieving Millennium Development Goal One (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), which is both a DFID and World Bank corporate priority. It is envisioned as the first-phase of a possible long term (5-10 years) multi-donor program of support. DFID is committed to address the problem of food insecurity and to give high priority to tackling the problem of malnutrition. The Bank has highlighted nutrition as a key issue under “Strategic Directions for the World Bank”. In South Asia, FNS issues are regarded as particularly high priority. Partly in response to country demand, and, with funding from the Regional Reprioritization Fund and Japanese Trust Funds, the Bank is in the process of scaling-up its response accordingly. The World Bank is trying to use its expertise in key sectors, not only to respond to current crises, but also to build programs for the medium term to meet the growing challenges.
2. SAFANS is fully aligned to the principles for Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security (GPAFS), agreed at the L’Aquila Summit in July 2009, in that it seeks to:
3. support and encourage country and regional-led processes and add value to them;
4. ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to combating malnutrition; and
5. strategically coordinate development agencies’ support through a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) administered by the World Bank.

## SAFANS will promote an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to FNS

1. SAFANS will use a three-pronged approach, combining analysis, advocacy, and capacity building activities to identify and address relevant constraints. It adopts an explicitly cross-sectoral approach, combining relevant elements from agriculture and rural development, health, nutrition social protection, and water and sanitationThe initiative aims to be transformational, and, therefore, it will be long-term and inclusive. Other development partners focusing on FNS in South Asia are encouraged to join the SAFANS initiative.

## SAFANS has a long-term vision and a broad scope

1. The long term goal[[10]](#footnote-10) of SAFANS is to ***improve food and nutritional outcomes across South Asia* in line with the MDG1c targets.**[[11]](#footnote-11) Given the “action deficit” in South Asia, this can be achieved only by adopting more effective and integrated policies and programs (and relevant behavioral changes at the community and family level). SAFANS is geared to high-level policy and decision makers, development partners, policy groups, civil society organizations, and opinion leaders in the region. Tactically, it will (a) facilitate access to improved evidence and analysis for decision-making and the opportunity to engage with colleagues in other countries in the region; (b) assimilate and share innovations and good practices in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of FNS-related programs; and (c) supporting thematic groups for better exchange of data and other information.
2. Towards this end, the development objectiveof SAFANS is *to increase the commitment of governments and development partners in South Asia to more effective and integrated FNS-related policies and investments*. An expected outcome of SAFANS is a stronger emphasis and accountability for action on FNS-related outcomes in development plans and country strategies, and follow-through in terms of more effective policies, institutional arrangements, and programs.
3. SAFANS will be guided by a number of principles:
4. Solving South Asia’s food security and nutrition problem requires strong political leadership and stewardship;
5. Nutrition outcomes must be central to regional and country food security policy and programming;
6. Food security and nutrition cannot be solved in silos but rather through coordinated inter-disciplinary, inter-ministerial, and cross-sectoral approach;
7. Coordination requires strong, focused partnerships among the institutions and individuals working on nutrition, safety nets, and food security;
8. Activities should add value to existing country and regional efforts instead of reinventing the wheel;
9. Activities should encourage coherence and coordination among countries and development agencies on what needs to be done;
10. Activities should focus on *actionable* research (whatworks and does not);
11. SAFANS should building the South Asian regional leaders and other actors to manage FNS issues; and
12. FNS priorities cannot be tackled if women and other marginalized groups are excluded from the process or the benefits.

## Activities will be defined by guiding principles and three outcome pillars

1. SAFANS “outputs” should helpbuild a strong basis for enhancing the commitment of key players (e.g., governments, non-state actors, and development partners) to:
2. improved evidence and analysis on the most effective ways to achieve FNS outcomes in South Asia;
3. improved awareness of FNS-related challenges, and advocacy for action, amongst *all relevant stakeholders*; and
4. strengthened regional and in-country policy and programming capacity in *relevant areas* to achieve FNS outcomes.
5. Accordingly, interventions under SAFANS will be organized under three corresponding pillars(or themes) which are described below. The implementation of SAFANS will be via a series of ta**s**ks that will either be executed by the Bank or by grant recipients (see figure 2 below).
6. Each task will consist of a set of activities with a definedresults framework (i.e., outputs and measurable, time-based indicators). The size, geographic scope and thematic content of the tasks, as well as associated implementation arrangements, will be defined in greater detail following further consultation with stakeholders during the inception phase of SAFANS (April – September 2010). However, any activity to be included under these tasks will pertain to one of SAFANS three core pillars: analysis, advocacy, capacity building. The implementation modalities will seek to encourage and strengthen country-led approaches, where possible, and will coordinate with other global FNS initiatives.
7. SAFANS is a regional initiative reaching every country in South Asia; however, individual tasks may be organized at regional, national, and even the sub-national level. This will be determined by the scale and spread of problems, operational contexts and specific learning, and/or advocacy needs.
8. A distinctive feature of SAFANS is its cross-cutting, multi-sectoral approach to seeking sustainable solutions to advancing the FNS agenda. As such, the Initiative will span themes from agricultural/rural development, nutrition, social protection, health, water, sanitation, poverty reduction and other sectors. Gender is a key cross-cutting issue that will be explicitly addressed in each activity supported by SAFANS. The results framework for each activity will also to include indicators to measure progress on gender-related aspects.

### Pillar 1: Better Evidence and Analysis

1. SAFANS will strengthen the substantive (evidential) and analytical basis for greater and more effective investments to improve FNS, including re-orienting existing programs and innovating with cross-cutting, multi-sectoral approaches. Illustrative activities include:

* Analysis of successful programs for delivering improved FNS outcomes in the region, emphasizing how to scale-up delivery approaches, and presenting them in formats easily accessible and understood by policymakers, media, and other key stakeholders;
* Systematic evaluations of existing FNS-related programs to ensure timely learning, assess efficacy, identify elements of feasible reform and undertake consolidation of support for these programs among policymakers;
* Analysis of innovative approaches that link safety net programs with nutritional security such as early child development programs or conditional cash transfers, and other programs such as on HIV, agriculture and rural development;
* Study of success stories and good practice examples from other regions (e.g., Thailand, Vietnam, China) to explore their applicability to the South Asian context;
* Analysis of constraints to effective policy coordination and program formulation at the regional level;
* Better understanding and documentation of links between FNS and other development goals, and impact of gender and social exclusion on FNS outcomes; and
* Programming guidance (on various aspects of program formulation, implementation and monitoring) for country level partners.

1. The focus will be on regional public goods and areas of value addition (e.g., cross-country lessons and research; addressing specific intra-regional policy issues, such as removing barriers to trade in food).

### Pillar 2: Improved Awareness and Advocacy

1. This pillar relates to building regional and country-level commitment to invest further in programs delivering FNS outcomes by increasing emphasis on it in various policies, development strategies and action plans. In particular, country policy makers and development partners have highlighted the need to understand and address the incentives for uptake and implementation of evidence based and integrated policy and programs to improve FNS. Illustrative activities include:

* Experiential (immersion) learning for high-level policy and decision makers in the region and elsewhere;
* Regional consultations to improve FNS outcomes (e.g., knowledge synthesis, inter-country learning, research and communications; removing barriers to intra-regional trade, joint agricultural and other research programmes, harmonisation of food standards among South Asian countries; coordinated action on agricultural diseases);
* Political economy analysis to understand the incentives and disincentives for policy reform in FNS-related programs and to accordingly inform the design of multi-sectoral strategies aimed at addressing problems in realization of FNS outcomes;
* Facilitating joint learning (e.g. by conducting joint comparative evaluations) among the countries and setting up a “community of interest” on food and nutrition security and safety net issues to discuss, conduct, research and manage knowledge to ensure that it is shared in a timely fashion;
* Promoting the mainstreaming of gender in the design of safety net and nutrition programs;
* Conferences, seminars, and discussion forums for senior policy makers and exposure visits for mid-level implementers as appropriate, including opportunities such as the SAARC;
* Dissemination of knowledge findings through website and other media.

### Pillar 3: Strengthened Institutional Capacity

1. Institutions from the regional down to the grassroots level need to raise their capacity to help on the demand side, by organizing and articulating community demands, and on the supply side, by improving the quality and effectiveness of public programs. Furthermore, this component is expected to fill gaps such as: capacity to plan programs at scale (using evidence), capacity to implement programs at scale, capacity to manage in an evidence-based manner (generating and using data), capacity to advocate using evidence and political intuition. Illustrative activities include:

* Exposure visits to encourage cross-fertilisation and South-South learning and cooperation;
* Ensuring knowledge sharing within and across the region, particularly promoting South-South Exchanges in FNS-related programs;
* Strengthening national forums and networks for national-level, multi-sectoral dialogue;
* Promoting regional FNS-related meetings to encourage dialogue leading to better coordination of strategies, where governments and donors link up;
* Strengthening of networks and partnerships where various institutional players (including the private sector) can interact with existing small players who may want to link up; and
* Strengthening and up-scaling institutions and systems that enhance effective delivery of FNS-related services through innovative approaches, such as the bundling of nutrition with provision of microfinance, safety nets, education, and health.

1. Over the initial three-year period SAFNSI aims to build policy capacity and stewardship of decision makers from within SAR, which, over time, could play an important role in greater policy convergence, cooperation and coordination among the countries with respect to FNS issues.

## The Environmental Context

1. The key environmental challenges facing the countries of South Asia (and especially the poorest) in achieving food security and overcoming hunger are **climate change** and the widespread **environmental degradation** in many parts of the region. With respect to climate change, IFPRI’s projections suggest that South Asia will be hardest hit, and that calorie intake will be lower in 2050 than in 2000 if off-setting actions are not taken. Environmental degradation is widespread in South Asia and is limiting agricultural growth in many parts of the region. These problems are a reflection of, among other things, poor environmental governance (including weak institutional frameworks and capacity at federal and local government levels) and failure by policy and decision makers to “internalize” demonstrated negative impacts of policies designed to increase production (e.g., groundwater “mining”, unbalanced fertilizer use).
2. These challenges should be addressed as part of South Asia’s efforts to overcome under-nutrition and hunger. In this regard, the MDTF will (a) seek to better understand the current and predicted impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on food security and nutrition; (b) ensure that relevant knowledge syntheses and research studies undertaken will include environmental analysis; and (c) explore opportunities to increase resilience to climate change and disasters for food and nutritional security outcomes.

1. FAO 2009: The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development: A Strategy for Development, 2006, The World Bank, Washington DC [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. World Bank (2009) Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook, Washington DC [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Independence Day Speech, Aug 15, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As an illustration of the multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional nature of FNS problems, Annex 2 provides framework of how various causal influences from different sectors that together help determine the outcome on child nutrition. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Note this does not argue against the importance of reducing income poverty (through productivity gains and livelihood development) as a means to address malnutrition in general. Evidence suggests that prevalence of malnutrition is two to three times – in some, many times – higher among the poorest income quintile than among the highest. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development: A Strategy for Development, 2006, The World Bank, Washington DC [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Heaver R, Strengthening Country Commitment to Human Development: Lesson from Nutrition. Directions in Development, The World Bank, Washington DC [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Smith, L., U. Ramakrishnan, A. Ndiaye, L. Haddad and R. Martorell. 2003. *The importance of Women’s Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries*, Research Report 131, IFPRI [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Expected longer term impacts if project interventions succeed in producing expected demand-side behavioral response from governments and development partners. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Target 1c: Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger; reduce the prevalence of underweight children under-five years of age ; reduce the proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption [↑](#footnote-ref-11)