

A CINDERELLA SECTOR? FUNDING FOR UNDERUTILISED CROP RESEARCH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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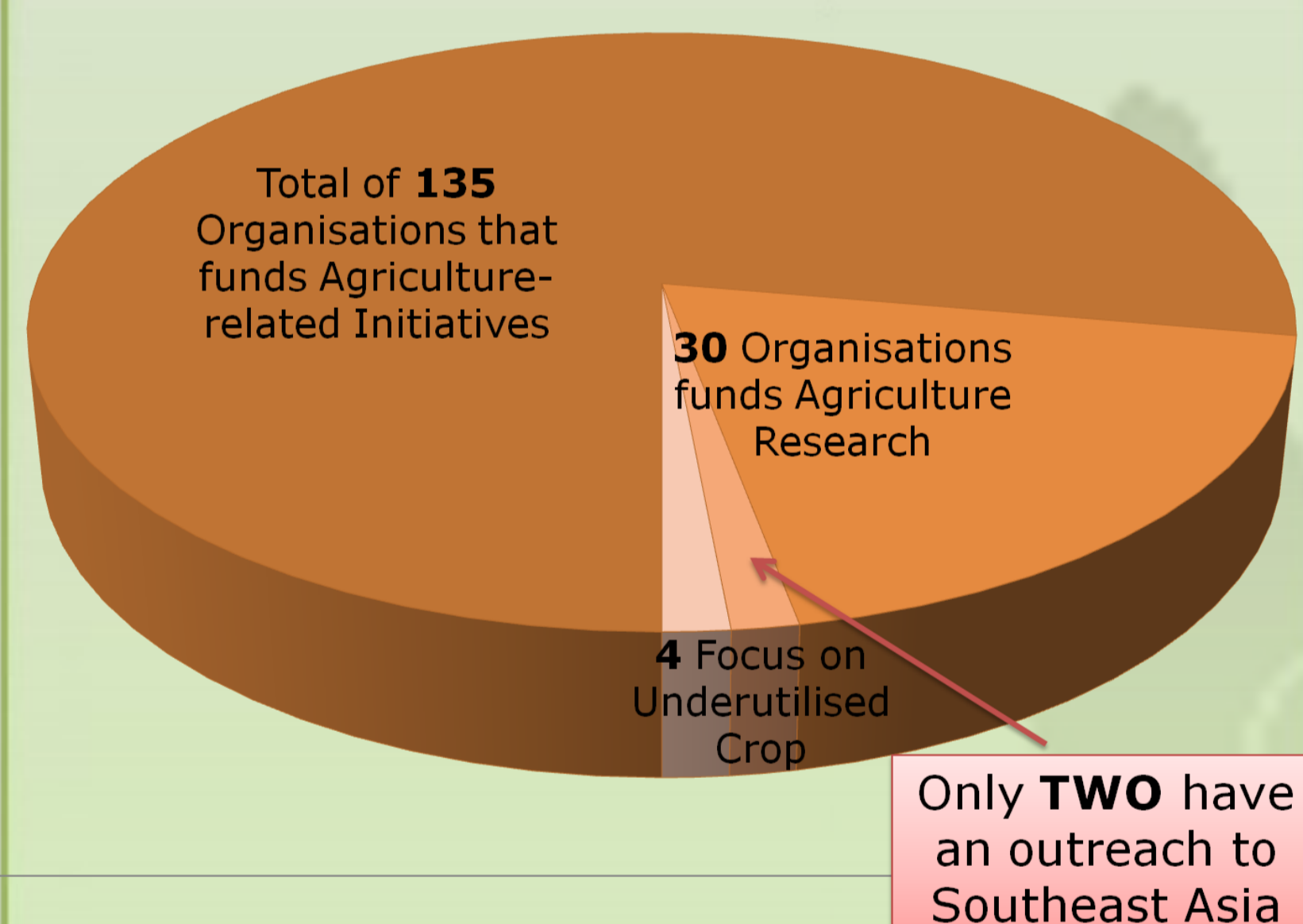
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INTRODUCTION

The need to develop and maximize the benefits derived from agriculture remains an important element of efforts to combat poverty and foster economic growth. However, researchers, policy makers and funders appear to have a limited awareness on the value and strength that underutilised crops play in the farming system. The findings of a preliminary survey of the agriculture research funding at national, regional and international level for Southeast Asia suggest that agriculture and research policies continue to favour innovations that relates to general agriculture themes such as 'environment and climate change', 'food security' and 'sustainable development', in which supports large scale production of a limited number of species in monocultures under these themes. The justification of funding new research initiatives by funders is increasingly based on a rigid set of criteria that limit the possibility of risk-taking and innovation (S.N Azam-Ali, 2010). This situation has impacted on the funding opportunities for underutilised crop research in the South East Asian Region.

#1 LACK OF SPECIFIC FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERUTILISED CROP RESEARCH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A total of 135 organisations that work on agriculture related initiatives were identified in this research. 30 (22.2%) organisations out of the total number of 135 support agriculture research initiatives. Among these 30 organisations, only 4 have a focus on both underutilised crop related initiatives and agriculture research. Only 2 of them have an outreach into Southeast Asia.



Only **TWO** of them have an outreach into **Southeast Asia**.

- Lack of specific funding opportunities for underutilised crop research in South East Asia
- Underutilised crop research in South East Asia is subjected to competition for funding opportunities against other agriculture initiatives

#2 ORGANISATION PREFER TO FUND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OVER AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Agricultural development that relates to general agriculture themes have more organisations focus upon.

- Out of 135 identified funding organisations, 25.3% fund scientific research in general; and only 22.2% fund agriculture research
- Out of 30 organisations that do fund agriculture research, only **FOUR** work on underutilised crop research!

Top 3 Agriculture-related themes

1	Environment and Climate Change
2	Sustainable Development
3	Food Security

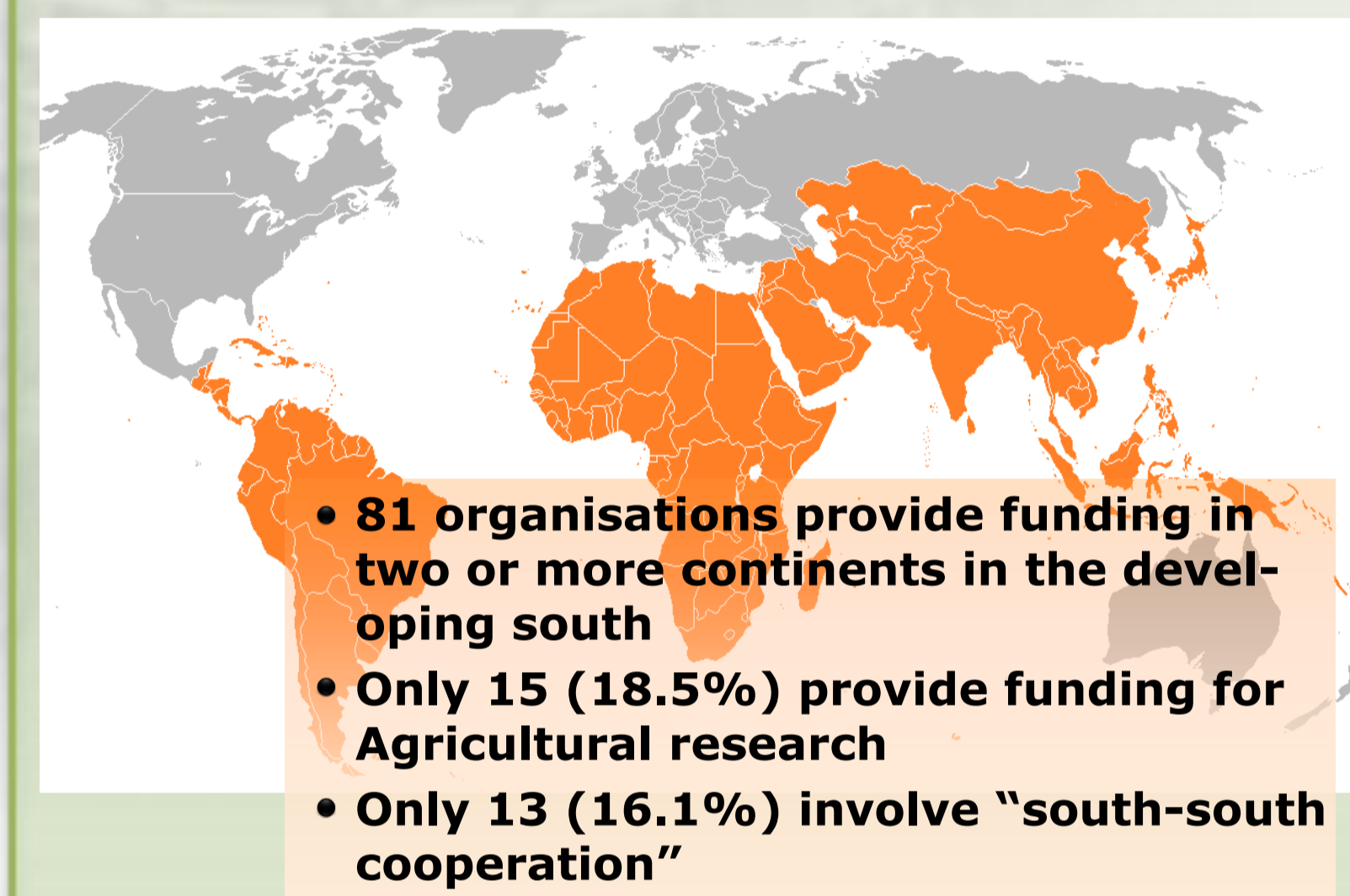
UNDERUTILISED CROP INITIATIVES WORK ON SAME AGRICULTURE-RELATED THEMES TOO

The content analysis of funding organizations' website, indicate that the benefits of underutilized crop research are viewed as the same as those of mainstream agricultural research. The **four** funding organisations that work on underutilized crops identify have the same thematic preferences as other funding organisations.

*"...convincing policy makers and investors that species often called 'underutilized' offer strong opportunities to solve major challenges like **nutrition and health**, the **resilience of eco-friendly farming systems**, and contribute to **income generation**"*

Website content of EGFAR

#3 LACK OF FOCUS ON SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE RESEARCH



Cooperation in underutilised crop research is necessary to disseminate knowledge gained in isolated research efforts, and this should be done at the national, regional and international level. (S.Padulosi et al, 2004)

Agenda of south-south cooperation is not used to its full potential, and this can be an avenue that underutilised crop research can tap into. International collaborative research in underutilised crop can benefit help in "setting research agendas mobilize support and built a cooperative interdisciplinary, critical mass of researches. (J. Can T. Williams et al, 2000)

Cooperation could maximise the benefits of underutilised crop research, and this is an area for organisations to promote south-south cooperation through collaboration in underutilised crop research.

DISCUSSION

The largely unfunded expansion of horticulture into underutilised crops in diverse farming system in South East Asia points to the considerable potential for diversification in the regions agriculture. The limited funding opportunities for underutilised crop research in South East Asia is a serious hurdle in the development of such crops in a region which is renowned for its agro-biodiversity. This needs to be address with substantial changes in the way agriculture research is conceptualised and implemented by researchers, policy makers and funders. Enhancing the capacity of the region's agriculture to successfully diversity can and should be done through increased investment in underutilised crops and the development of collaborative research networks with other regions globally.

REFERENCE

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