

FAO & AUN-AFS YOUTH RESEARCH PROPOSAL COMPETITION 2026

Empowering the Next
Generation of Agrifood
Leaders in ASEAN+3.

A strategic initiative focused on Food
Security and Agrifood Systems
Transformation.

Co-organized by:



Program Dashboard: Bridging Science and Policy

A joint initiative to strengthen youth engagement in agrifood systems research, generating evidence to support sustainable, resilient, and inclusive transformation across Asia.



The Goal

Promote youth-led research innovation that directly informs policy dialogue and programmatic action.



The Target

Master's students from ASEAN Member States + China, Republic of Korea, and Japan (ASEAN+3 UNet).

Age: 35 years old and below



The Mechanism

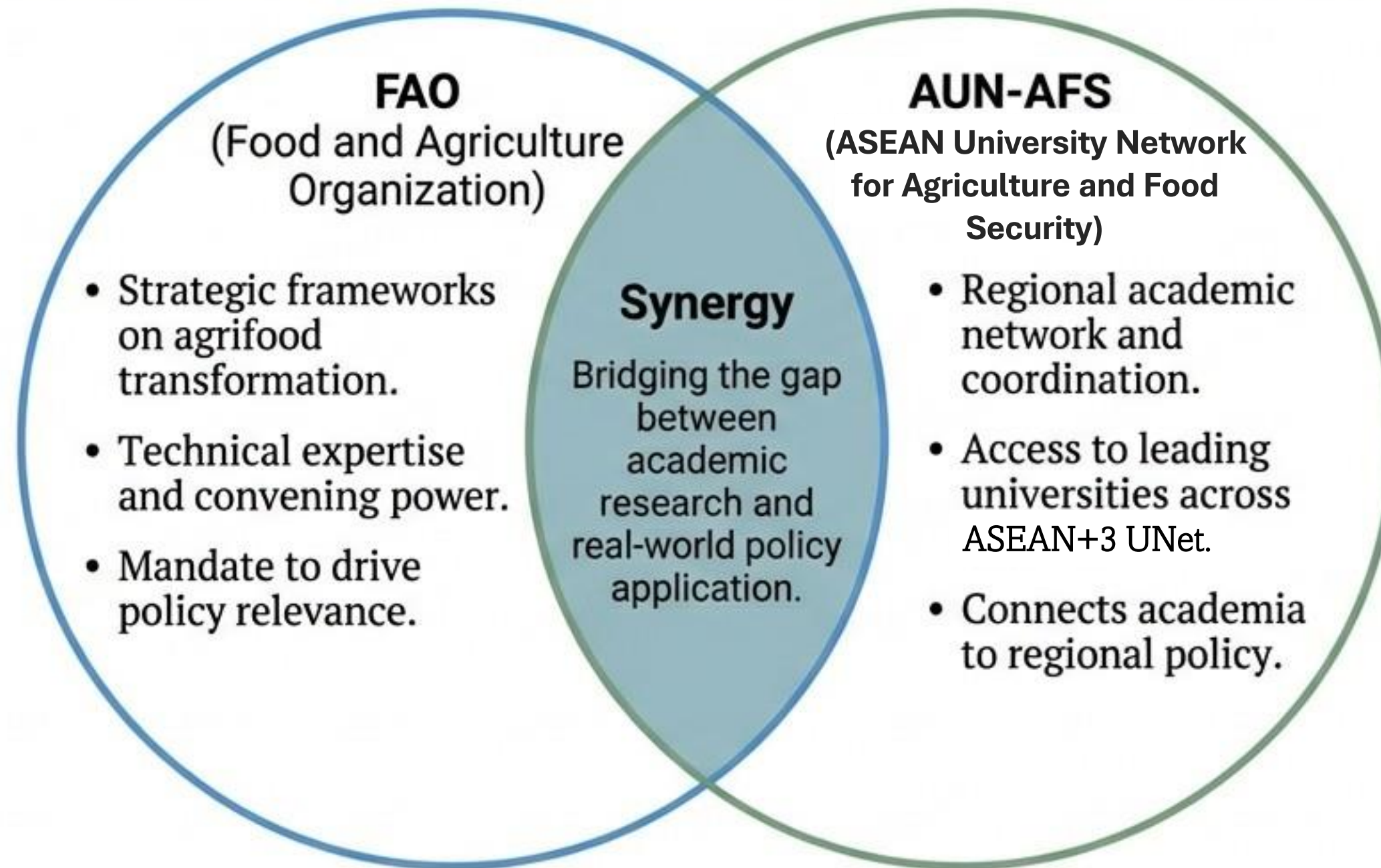
A competitive pipeline moving from Proposal → Mentorship → Grant Award → Policy Dialogue



The Partnership

Leveraging the combined technical expertise of FAO and the academic network of AUN-AFS.

A Strategic Partnership: Combining Strengths



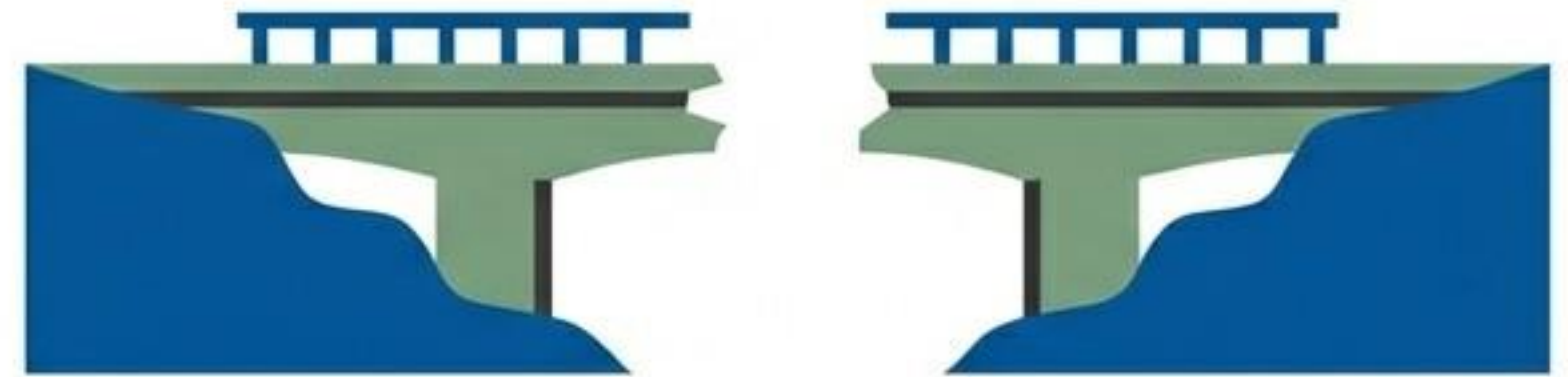
The Imperative for Youth-Led Innovation

The Macro Context



- Agrifood systems in Asia are undergoing rapid transformation.
- Persistent Challenges: Food security, climate change, environmental sustainability, and the need for inclusive development.
- Requirement: Addressing these interlinked challenges demands innovative, evidence-based solutions.

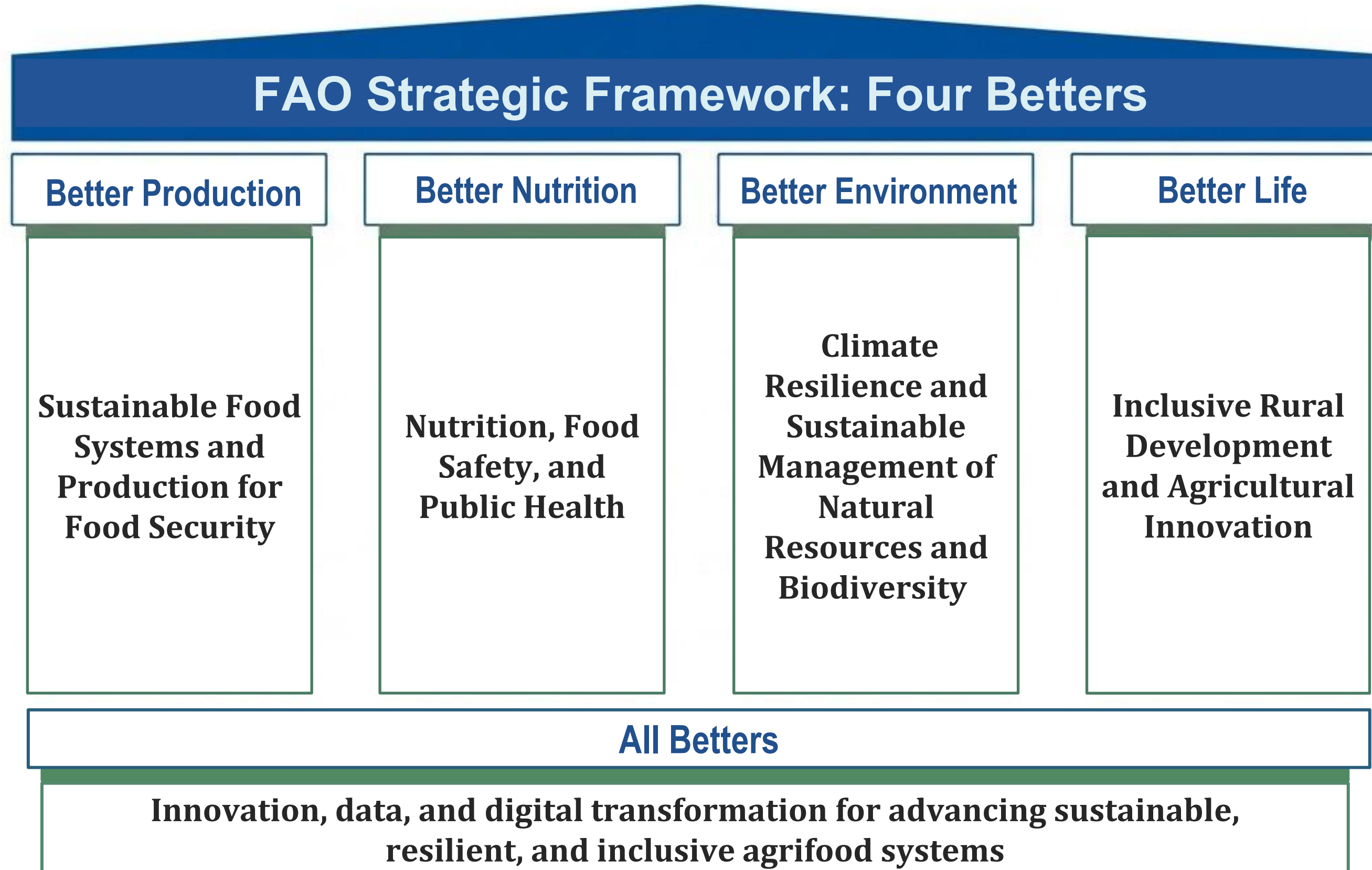
The Critical Gap



- Youth and graduate students are a critical talent pool for the future of the sector.
- The Problem: Structured regional platforms that support youth-led research are limited.
- The Missing Link: A specific lack of mechanisms that connect research capacity with science-policy linkages.

Strategic Alignment: Research Priority Areas

All proposed research topics must align with the FAO priority program framework to ensure policy relevance.



Thematic Area

Sustainable Food Systems and Production for Food Security

Focus of Research

Research focusing on enhancing availability, accessibility, stability, and utilization of food through resilient and efficient food systems

Key Areas Covering

- Sustainable crop and livestock production systems
- Value chain optimization and agri-food logistics
- Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture



**BETTER
PRODUCTION**

Thematic Area

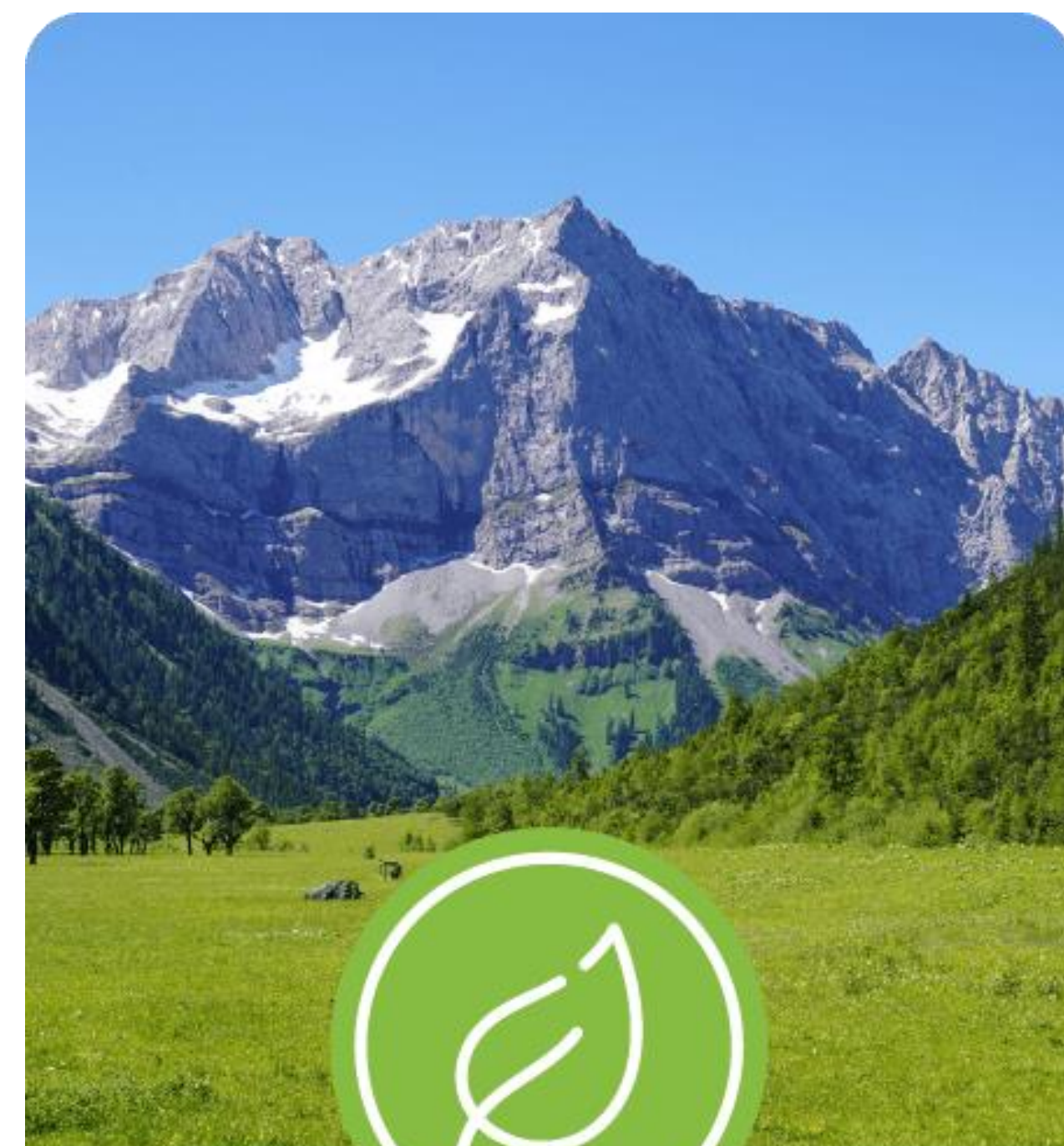
Climate-Resilience and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and Biodiversity

Focus of Research

Research addressing adaptation, mitigation, and resilience of agricultural systems to climate change and environmental stressors, while promoting the responsible use and conservation of land, water, forests, fisheries, and genetic resources

Key Areas Covering

- Climate-resilient crops and livestock
- Carbon-smart and low-emission farming practices
- Climate risk assessment and early warning systems
 - Nature-based solutions and ecosystem services
 - Soil health and water-use efficiency
 - Agro-biodiversity conservation



**BETTER
ENVIRONMENT**



**BETTER
NUTRITION**

Thematic Area

Nutrition, Food Safety, and Public Health

Focus of Research

Research supporting healthy diets, safe food supply, and improved nutritional outcomes across populations

Key Areas Covering

- Food safety standards and risk assessment
- Micronutrient deficiencies and biofortification
- One Health approaches linking human, animal, and environmental health
- Functional foods and dietary diversification
- Nutrition-sensitive agriculture

Thematic Area

Inclusive Rural Development and
Agricultural Innovation

Focus of Research

Research enhancing livelihoods, equity, and
innovation among smallholders, women,
youth, and vulnerable communities

Key Areas Covering

- Digital agriculture and smart farming technologies
 - Socioeconomic transformation of rural areas
- Gender and youth empowerment in agri-food systems
 - Agricultural policy, governance, and institutions





Thematic Area

Innovation, data, and digital transformation for advancing sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems

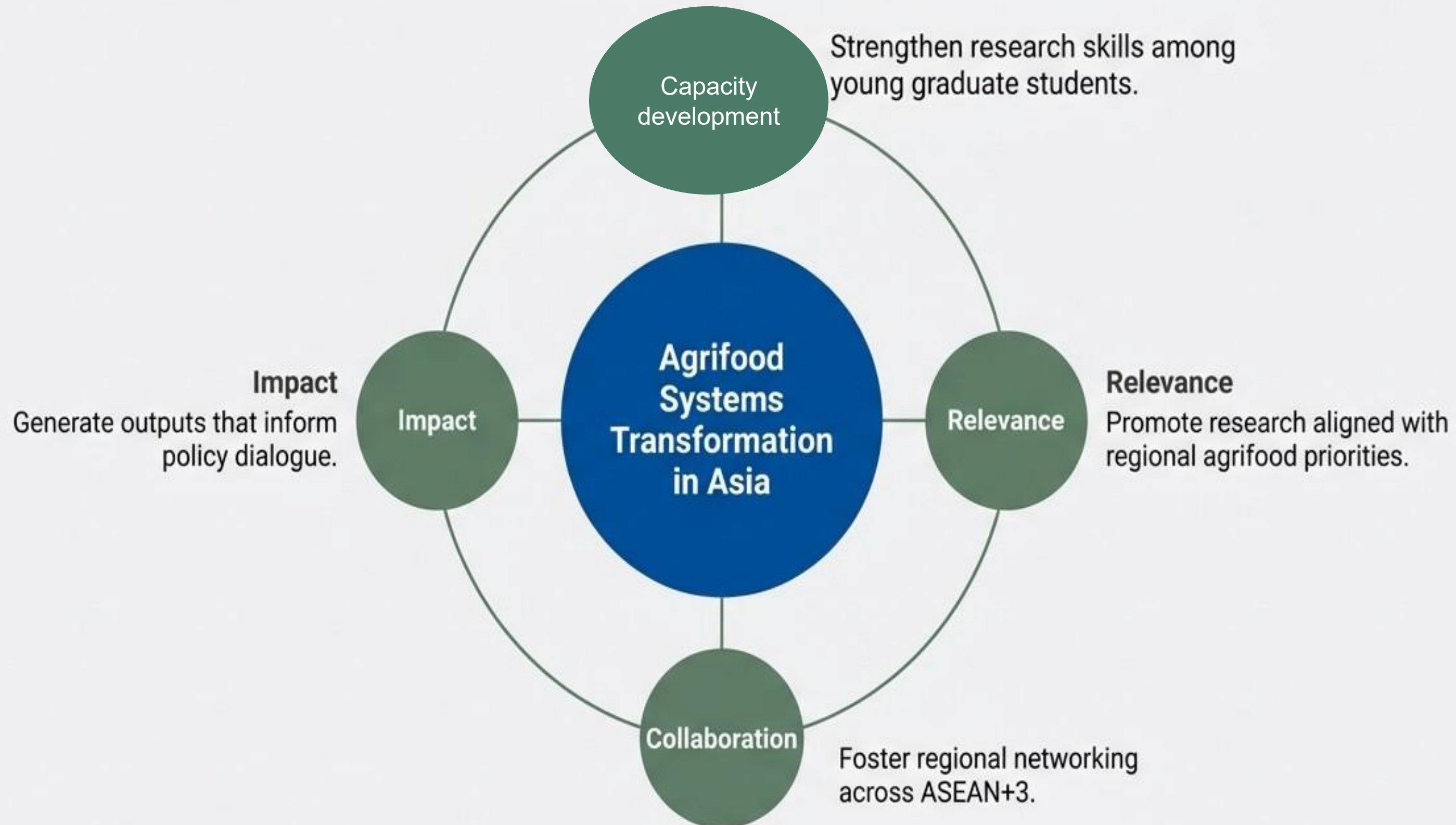
Focus of Research

Research generating knowledge, methods, and tools that integrate scientific, technological, and traditional knowledge with data and digital approaches to advance sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems, supporting informed decision-making and scalable, context-appropriate solutions

Key Areas Covering

- Integration of scientific, technological, and traditional knowledge for agrifood systems innovation
- Data-informed and participatory approaches to enhance agrifood systems performance and resilience
- Context-appropriate digital and hybrid solutions supporting sustainable production and resource management
- Scalable, inclusive, and gender-responsive innovation pathways for agrifood systems transformation

Core Mission: Driving Transformation Through Research



Target Group & Geographic Scope



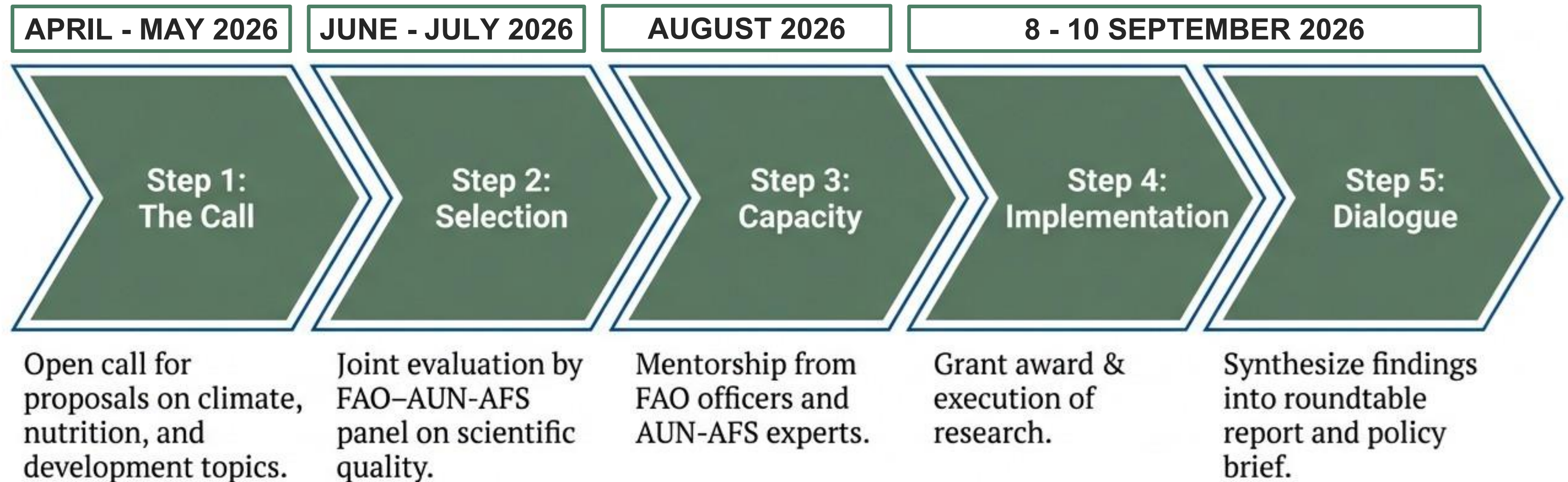
Target Profile

Master's students currently enrolled in universities within the mapped region.

Selection Criteria

- **Academic Merit:** Excellence in current studies.
- **Relevance:** Alignment with the 'Four Betters' and agrifood priorities.
- **Innovation:** Novelty of the proposed solution.
- **Feasibility:** Practical viability of the research project.

The Programme Journey: From Concept to Policy



FAO–AUN-AFS YOUTH RESEARCH COMPETITION 2026

Thematic Areas & Recommended
Introductory Courses
(FAO eLearning Academy)

Co-organized by:



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



ASEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORK FOR
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY



ASEAN
University
Network



UPM
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA
BERILMU BERBAKTI

Thematic Area 1

|Better Production

*Sustainable Food
Systems, and Production
for Food Security*

Research focus:

Research enhancing availability, accessibility, stability, and utilization of food through resilient and efficient food systems.

LIST OF COURSES:

1. Sustainable Food Systems: An Introduction – [Access Course](#)
2. Climate-Smart Crop Production – [Access Course](#)
3. Plant Genetic Resources Documentation – [Access Course](#)
4. Sustainable Tuna Fisheries – Introduction – [Access Course](#)
5. Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries – [Access Course](#)
6. Understanding Antimicrobial Resistance – [Access Course](#)
7. Agripreneurship 101 – [Access Course](#)

Thematic Area 2

|Better Environment

*Climate Resilience, and
Sustainable Management
of Natural Resources &
Biodiversity*

Research focus:

Research addressing adaptation, mitigation, and resilience of agricultural systems to climate change and environmental stressors, while promoting responsible use and conservation of land, water, forests, fisheries, and genetic resources.

LIST OF COURSES:

1. Biodiversity and Agrifood Systems – [Access Course](#)
2. Agroforestry for Sustainable Agrifood Transformation – [Access Course](#)
3. Forest Management Planning – [Access Course](#)
4. Agricultural Ecosystem-Based Solutions – [Access Course](#)
5. Forest and Landscape Restoration – [Access Course](#)
6. Climate-Smart Agriculture – [Access Course](#)
7. An introduction to Urban and Peri-urban Forestry – [Access Course](#)

Thematic Area 3

|Better Nutrition

*Nutrition, Food Safety
& Public Health*

Research focus:

Research supporting healthy diets, safe food supply, and improved nutritional outcomes across populations.

LIST OF COURSES:

1. Introduction to Codex – [Access Course](#)
2. Sustainable Food Value Chains for Nutrition – [Access Course](#)
3. Pathways to Healthy Diets – [Access Course](#)
4. Right to Adequate Food – [Access Course](#)
5. Trade, Food Security and Nutrition – [Access Course](#)
6. Pre-breeding – [Access Course](#)
7. Nutrition, Food Security and Livelihoods – [Access Course](#)

Thematic Area 4 | Better Life

Inclusive Rural Development & Agricultural Innovation

Research focus:

Research enhancing livelihoods, equity, and innovation among smallholders, women, youth, and vulnerable communities.

LIST OF COURSES:

1. Right to Food Fundamentals – [Access Course](#)
2. Food Security, Nutrition and Social Protection – [Access Course](#)
3. Understanding Rural Poverty – [Access Course](#)
4. Decent Work in Rural Areas – [Access Course](#)
5. Managing Climate Risks through Social Protection – [Access Course](#)

Thematic Area 5

|All Betters

Innovation, Data & Digital Transformation for Advancing Sustainable, Resilient & Inclusive Agrifood Systems

Research focus:

Research generating knowledge, methods, and tools that integrate scientific, technological, and traditional knowledge with data and digital approaches to advance sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems, supporting informed decision-making and scalable, context-appropriate solutions.






LIST OF COURSES:

1. Responsible Investment in Agriculture – [Access Course](#)
2. Biodiversity and Agrifood Systems – [Access Course](#)
3. Building Equitable Agrifood Systems – [Access Course](#)
4. Sustainable Food Systems: An Introduction – [Access Course](#)
5. Concept and Framework – [Access Course](#)
6. Operationalizing the Approach – [Access Course](#)
7. Developing Gender-Sensitive Value Chains – [Access Course](#)
8. Engaging with Stakeholders on Plant Health – [Access Course](#)

APPLICATION NOW OPEN!



Scan the QR code to apply

Website	Link
 <p>Competition Application Form <i>(April – May 2026)</i></p>	<p>Access link</p>
 <p>AUN-AFS Website</p>	<p>Access link</p>
 <p>ASEAN+3 UNet Core & Affiliate Members Universities List</p>	<p>Access link</p>
 <p>FAO eLearning Academy</p>	<p>Access link</p>
 <p>Introductory Course Materials <i>(Badge Requirement)</i></p>	<p>Access link</p>

Implementation Highlight: The Pitch & The Grant



10th International Agriculture Congress (IAC10)

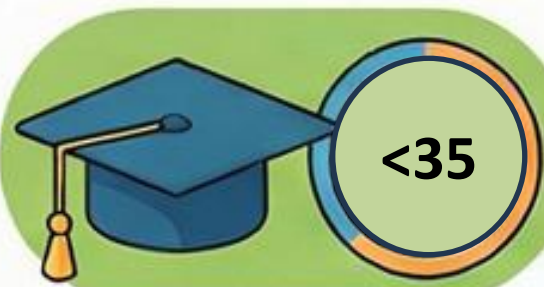
Host: Faculty of Agriculture, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)
On the 8th – 10th September 2026 in Malaysia

- The selection process culminates in a live pitching session.
- Shortlisted candidates present proposals in person to a joint panel.
- **The Reward: FIVE (5)** winning proposal is selected and awarded the research grant to support project implementation.

USD2,000 each

The Path to the FAO–AUN AFS Youth Research Grant

Phase 1: Eligibility & Submission



Essential Applicant Criteria

Master's students under age <35 with English proficiency from eligible AUN institutions.



Thematic Research Alignment

Proposals must focus on Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment, Better Life, or All Betters.



Mandatory Documentation

Submit a CV, research proposal, recommendation letters, and proof of enrollment.

Phase 2: Selection & The Grand Prize



Shortlist Pitch at IAC10

Fifteen finalists will travel to Malaysia in September 2026 for the final session.



Live Pitching Session

Finalists present their research proposals live to a joint expert panel.






USD2,000 RESEARCH GRANT

FIVE (5) winning proposal is selected for full funding to support project implementation.


Anticipated Value & Impact

Tangible Outputs

-  Research proposals submitted across ASEAN+3.
-  Capacity development & mentorship sessions delivered.
-  Execution of youth-led research projects.
-  Academic Roundtable Report & Policy Brief produced.



Strategic Results

-  Enhanced analytical capacity of young researchers.
-  Improved availability of evidence-based research for policymakers.
-  Strengthened regional networks.
-  Increased youth engagement in agrifood policymaking.



Shaping the Future of Agrifood Systems

The FAO–AUN-AFS Programme is more than a competition; it is a structured regional platform ensuring that the next generation of researchers can drive sustainable and inclusive transformation in Asia.

Collaborate with us to advance youth engagement in research and policy.

AUN-AFS & FAO Partnership | 2026



FAO-AUN-AFS YOUTH RESEARCH PROPOSAL COMPETITION 2026

EMPOWERING YOUTH INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN!

The FAO – AUN-AFS Youth Research Proposal Competition 2026

invites young researchers and graduate students across ASEAN+3 to submit innovative ideas on food security and agrifood systems transformation. Organized by FAO and AUN-AFS, the competition aims to build youth research capacity, encourage policy-relevant solutions, and strengthen regional collaboration. Master's students aged 35 and below are encouraged to submit proposals aligned with FAO's Four Betters - Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment, and Better Life - together with the "All Betters" theme of innovation, data, and digital transformation for sustainable agrifood systems.

RESEARCH THEMES

- Better Production (Sustainable Food Systems and Production for Food Security)
- Better Environment (Climate- Resilience and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and Biodiversity)
- Better Nutrition (Nutrition, Food Safety, and Public Health)
- Better Life (Inclusive Rural Development and Agricultural Innovation)
- All Betters (Innovation, data, and digital transformation for advancing sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems).

KEY DATES

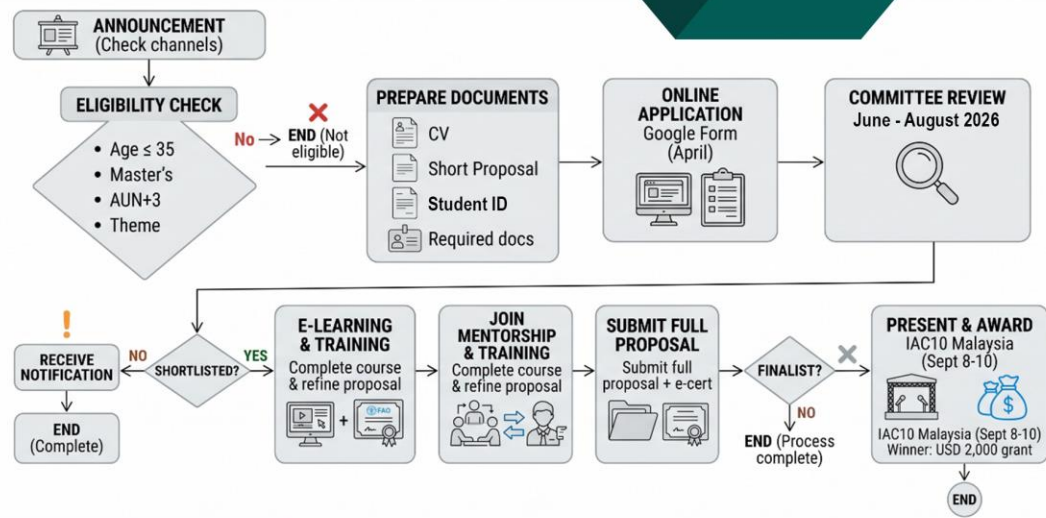
April 2026	Applications Open
July/August 2026	Notification
8 – 10 September 2026	Finalist presentation in Malaysia

WHO CAN APPLY

- Master's Students
- 35 Years & Below
- ASEAN+3 UNet Member Universities

WHAT YOU GET

- Present at The 10th International Agriculture Congress (IAC10), Malaysia
- USD 2,000 Research Grant (per thematic winner)
- Regional Networking Opportunities



APPLY NOW



Application Form



AUN-AFS (AUN) website



ASEAN+3 UNet Core & Affiliate members' list



FAO eLearning Academy website



eLearning Introductory Course





Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



ASEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORK FOR
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