

Project Launch Meeting
**Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds
Trade between India and Bangladesh**

Hotel Floatel, Kolkata, Friday-Saturday, 19-20 April, 2013

Objectives

The main objective of the project launch meeting is to ensure:

1. Members of the project team, Project Advisory Committee and other experts including key participants/informants and project partners are on to the same footing/page as far as project activities, outputs and outcomes are concerned. Additionally, it is also for validation of activities, outputs and outcomes; and
2. Discussion on activities, outputs and desired/expected outcomes

Expected Outputs

The meeting will lead to the following outputs:

1. Revision of log frame, including key milestones, if required;
2. A detailed quarterly plan for each collaborating organisation; and
3. A complete monitoring plan for the project.

Background & Context

Rice production and consumption on a sustainable basis can be argued to be a lifeline for the people in both eastern part of India (especially Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal) and in Bangladesh. For four states in eastern India, rice is undoubtedly one of the most important sources of food security. Position of rice with respect to Bangladesh is more important, as it is the most important crop, and is important for both lives and livelihood of millions of farmers.

Apart from what is stated above, it is also true that there are serious challenges to sustainable production of rice in both India and Bangladesh. In addition, it is also observed, especially in case of small and marginal farmers, that yield and productivity of rice in four states of India and Bangladesh are low as compared to other rice producing regions in India and outside. What makes the issue more complicated is the evidence which suggests that the adoption of high-yielding (inbred or hybrid) varieties of seeds is quite high even among small farmers. The question then is “why the productivity of small farmers, particularly rice farmers of eastern India and in Bangladesh is not that high? Is it a case of high-yielding varieties of seeds not yielding higher productivity as a result of unfavourable environmental conditions and other factors/agricultural practices?” The

problem to some extent is reflected by a recent news article in Bangladesh which indicates that about 80 percent of seeds in Bangladesh are of inferior quality. The case in India is not much different.

In addition to what is indicated above, it is also observed that despite a similar agro-climatic condition in these four states of India and in Bangladesh, the level of cooperation between the inputs (including seeds) suppliers and other stakeholders in two countries is quite low. Studies demonstrate that similarity of agro-climatic conditions in eastern India and Bangladesh make high yielding rice varieties grown in eastern India suitable for Bangladeshi farmers. Similarly, there are several varieties of rice seeds available in Bangladesh which could be useful in Indian conditions. Considering the similarities, it is surprising that neither Bangladesh nor India trade/import seeds with each other. There are, however, evidences of informal rice seed trade occurring between two countries.

Major Issues

The question is if both India and Bangladesh suffer from inferior quality of seeds (rice) and if Bangladesh it is importing high-yielding rice seeds from other countries, and if there is informal rice seeds trade between India and Bangladesh, then why India and Bangladesh is not formally importing high-yielding rice seeds from each other? What regulatory and policy factors constrain such trade in rice seeds? Given the existing level of poverty and the imperative of agricultural growth in poverty reduction, the issue of low yield and lack of cooperation is particularly important and needs to be effectively addressed in both eastern India and in Bangladesh.

The Way Forward

The project is an attempt to help resolve some of the issues that hamper cooperation in rice seeds between the two countries. Over a period of 21 months (January 2013 to September 2014), this project will address this question through desk research and field research on trade and trade-related regulatory challenges to rice seeds trade between India and Bangladesh.

The project seeks to provide answer to questions such as:

- What would be the potential gains to Bangladesh from substantially larger capacity of India to produce rice seeds, if they are imported?
- Also, given the fact that Bangladesh has released about 70 high-yielding varieties of rice, what would be likely gains from the use of some of these varieties in India if formal trade in seeds develops?