

Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh (RISTE Project)

Report of the 3rd and Final PAC Meeting

1. Introduction

1.1 On the successful completion of the project ‘Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh’ (the RISTE project), CUTS International organised the third and final meeting of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) on April 30, 2015 at Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi. The project was supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The meeting was chaired by Bipul Chatterjee, Deputy Executive Director of CUTS International, and attended by members of the PAC, including Project Advisor and Former Senior Scientist of the International Rice Research Institute, Sushil Pandey.

2. Objectives

2.1 There were three major objectives of this meeting:

- To appraise the progress made in dissemination of major outputs;
- To discuss the achievements of the project; and
- To discuss way forward in the light of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the apex seed associations of India and Bangladesh.

3. Participation

3.1 Out of the 12 PAC members, following were present in the meeting:

- Sushil Pandey, Project Advisor and Former Sr. Scientist of IRRI
- Sudhir Chandra Nath, Head, Agriculture and Food Security Program, BRAC, Bangladesh
- Debdukt Behura, Rice Seed Expert, Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology
- Syed A.K.M, Asadul Amin, General Secretary, Bangladesh Seeds Association
- Bipul Chatterjee, Deputy Executive Director, CUTS International
- Suresh P Singh, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

3.2 Besides them, the following persons attended it as special invitees:

- Mustafizur Rahman, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh
- Enamul Haque, Project Team Leader, Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh
- Mahfuz Kabir, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (lead researcher of the Bangladesh component of the project)
- Md. Mahabub Hasan, Senior Research Associate, Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka
- Shaheen ul Alam, Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka

3.3 In addition, the following representatives of project partners from India participated:

- Ashim Das, Mukti, West Bengal
- Amal Raj, Bihar Water Development Society
- Prabhas Akhour, Indian Grameen Services (Basix), Jharkhand

4. Discussion and Observations

4.1 Bipul Chatterjee provided some opening remarks highlighting the importance of the RISTE project. Achievements of the project with respect to set objectives and expected outcomes indicate that the project had successfully achieved its stated objectives and now had to address the challenge of sustaining the momentum that it had generated. He highlighted that the project has made it theoretically possible to carry out trade in HYV rice seeds between India and Bangladesh. However, he also pointed out the inherent challenge as to how it can be made happening from possibility.

4.2 Furthermore, he underlined the following:

- This project has for the first time created a platform for stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities, and provide solutions for facilitating cross-border trade in HYV rice seeds.
- There is now specific role for every stakeholder in facilitating this trade.
- There is urgent need to create awareness amongst traders.
- The role of State Governments along with sub-national organisations is very important for taking forward this initiative.

4.3 Sushil Pandey had high praise for the achievement of the project. Based on the outputs produced under the project, he mentioned that tremendous amount of knowledge had been generated. It has been an excellent project considering that there was no data available at the beginning of the project. To carry forward the achievements of the project, he highlighted the following:

- It is not possible for just one stakeholder to take this forward and that there is a need to sustain this platform.
- The stakeholders need to ensure that the findings of the project are used to influence policy and that is something we should be aiming to achieve.
- He proposed for a second phase of the project. In this phase stakeholders should identify areas with knowledge gap.
- We should strengthen our links with Seed Divisions of respective Ministry of Agriculture, other relevant government agencies, and also seed associations.
- There is a need for broader canvassing of issues for strengthening government-to-government, business-to-business, and people-to-people relations to sustain the momentum.
- For sustaining momentum and to take the achievements forward, a mechanism has to be created to include breeder seeds for local production.
- There is need for cultivating champions who would take this forward.
- The project team should cull out key findings and use them to keep pushing a positive agenda.
- It is very important that stakeholders, especially those involved in the RISTE project, should continue to talk to each other, take part in important meetings, and keep themselves apprised of sectoral knowledge, developments and events.
- There is need for follow up and continuous writing in newspapers.

4.4 Sudhir Chandra Nath stressed upon the need for material transfer. Without formal trade, not much can be gained. Important question is who will become the champions in taking this forward. He also mentioned that inter-ministerial issues are to be handled to take forward this initiative.

4.5 Enamul Haque stressed that involving government of the two countries is critical. He also stressed that leaving the project at this juncture will not do good and that a major push is required to use the knowledge generated. Key findings of the project have to be culled out and policy/practice changes needs to be pushed.

4.6 Mushfizur Rahman suggested that we must go horizontally and consider looking at other crops to sustain the momentum gained through this project. For this, stakeholders should come together and a mechanism should be created for awareness generation. Since the project is on trade, the Ministry of Commerce has a major role to play. Cooperation from the government could be facilitated through the two apex seed associations: National Seed Association of India and Bangladesh Seeds Association, which have already signed a MoU. He also highlighted that since both sides will have offensive interest on seeds trade, it is imperative to keep relevant government officials involved. He also suggested that the next phase of the project should include Bhutan and Nepal as such issues have the potentiality to showcase the benefits of sub-regional cooperation.

4.7 Asadul Amin Dadan stressed that the MoU would be translated into reality if:

- There is mapping trade processes/time and identification of barriers on real time basis. NSAI and BSA should sit together, identify barriers and do advocacy at the relevant levels for their removal.
- NSAI is better placed in terms of global perspective on seeds trade. BSA would gain from its collaboration with NSAI.
- There is need for making a Working Group and organise workshops to generate awareness among traders.

4.8 The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Bipul Chatterjee. At the end, he pointed out that India has a National Seed Policy and that one of its objectives is to capture 10 per cent of the global market for seeds by 2020 as compared to two per cent at present. Taking forward this initiative and its up-scaling will help India to achieve this objective.