

Report of the Dissemination and Advocacy Meeting

# **Trade and Knowledge-sharing in HYV Rice Seeds**

*Scope for Agricultural Cooperation between  
Bangladesh and India*

New Delhi, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015

## 1. Introduction

1.1 An advocacy and dissemination meeting of the project entitled, 'Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh' (RISTE) was organised at New Delhi on April 30, 2015 with the theme 'Trade and Knowledge-sharing in HYV Rice Seeds: *Scope for Agricultural Cooperation between Bangladesh and India*'. The objectives of the meeting were to facilitate the signing of MoU between the apex seeds associations of Bangladesh and India; disseminate major outputs of the project; and advocate for an enabling environment for cross-border trade and knowledge-sharing not just in HYV rice seeds but also in other agricultural inputs between two countries.

1.2 The meeting was attended by more than 60 participants from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan comprising representatives from specific government departments, seeds' associations, agriculture universities and research institutions, academia, subject experts, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media, CUTS project partners from India and Bangladesh and CUTS team members involved in the project in various capacities.

1.3 Some of the important participants include Rajesh Kumar Singh, Joint Secretary (Seeds), Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India; Salahuddin Noman Chowdhury, Deputy High Commissioner, Bangladesh High Commission, New Delhi; Shahjahan Kabir, Director, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute; Sushil Pandey, Former Senior Agricultural Economist, International Rice Research Institute; Sanjay Kumar Singh, Principal Scientist, Indian Agricultural Research Institute; A K Enamul Haque, Professor, East-West



University, Bangladesh; Mahfuz Kabir, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies; Debduddh Behura, Professor, Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology; Bipul Malakar, (rtd.) Professor, Jadavpur University; Kalyan Goswami, Executive Director, National Seed Association of India; Ashadul Amin Dadan, General Secretary, Bangladesh Seed Association; Debjyoti Guha, Working Secretary, Bengal Seed Association; Sudhir Chandra Nath, Programme Head, BRAC, Bangladesh; Md. Niazuddin Pasha, Senior Technical Officer, SAARC Agriculture Centre, Bangladesh; R K Singh, Executive Director, Nand Educational Foundation for Rural Development, Lucknow; Mustafizur Rahman, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh; Md. Osman Khan, Director, Seed Certification Agency, Government of Bangladesh; five project partners (Bihar Water Development Society, Bihar; Samrudhi, Odisha; Mukti, West Bengal; Indian Grameen Services, Jharkhand and Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh).

1.4 Major observations from the meeting are delineated below.

- The central theme of discussion for the first session was 'HYV Rice Seeds: *Scope for Trade and Knowledge Sharing between Bangladesh and India*'. This session focussed on why cooperation in HYV rice seeds and knowledge sharing between Bangladesh and India is conspicuous by its absence despite the fact that trade in other seeds is happening regularly. It further deliberated



- on issues to be addressed for fostering bilateral trade in HYV rice seeds and the necessity for knowledge sharing. Major points of discussion revolved around factors responsible for lack of cooperation between Bangladesh and India. These include: a) rice seeds being a notified crop is itself a barrier for trade; b) lack of political will and commitment in the area of rice seeds; c) lack of mutual recognition of rice seeds varieties released in two countries; d) issues related to intellectual property rights (IPRs); and e) lack of harmonisation in laws, regulations and policies relating to rice seeds.
- As a solution to the above mentioned issues, distinguished panellists deliberated on following suggestions made by speakers: a) mutual recognition of released varieties by both countries; b) harmonisation of laws, regulations and policies; c) joint development, trial and release of rice seed varieties; and d) addressing issues relating to IPRs.
- Agricultural Cooperation between Bangladesh and India was the centre of discussions in the second session. In the context of bilateral trade and knowledge sharing in HYV rice seeds, this session deliberated on larger aspects of agricultural cooperation between Bangladesh and India, and the role that public and private sector players can and should play.
- The session focussed on further areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and India which includes: a) adoption of a quality policy through geographical indications agreement by learning through the example of proposed EU-China common quality policy in the field of agriculture; and b) bringing FAO in the centre of development discourse for enhanced knowledge-sharing experience in South-South Cooperation.
- It further highlighted outcome-based approaches for enhanced cooperation between Bangladesh and India by: a) implementation of an effective agricultural development strategy through the triangulation of public-private-civil society partnership; b) formulation of a comprehensive SPS Agreement between Bangladesh and India through standardisation, harmonisation, and recognition of mutual standards, certification and laboratory tests to remove current bottlenecks in bilateral trade countries; c) development of infrastructure at Land Customs Station to promote bilateral trade in agriculture between Bangladesh and India; d) institutional capacity building (both private and public); and e) resolving existing water sharing disputes.

## 2. Progress of the Project

2.1 The project commenced with the study of a HYV rice seeds which did not have proper formal market in both the countries. Prevalence of informal market, regulatory barriers, demand- and supply-side constraints, policy-cum-regulatory issues were at the core of starting phase.

2.2 The project progressed through rigorous desk research and extensive field work in India (Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal) and Bangladesh. A number of activities were conducted to achieve the desired goal of the project, some of these include: 15 focussed group discussions, five state- and country-level workshops, four international conferences/meetings/parallel sessions, presentation of findings in more than half dozen national and international seminars and conferences, more than 15 *kisaan fairs/goshtis* in rural areas, five media training exercises, etc. Findings were disseminated through project reports, briefing papers, discussion papers, and by using internet, social media, print and electronic media.

2.3 Some of the major revelations of the project are: informal trade in HYV rice seeds is thriving; farmers demand access to quality rice seeds available across the border; identification of rice seed varieties informally traded; identification of points of informal trade in HYV rice seeds and stakeholders in both Bangladesh and India seem to be at consensus for formalisation of trade and greater cooperation between two countries.

2.4 Extensive research conducted during second phase of the project pointed out that informal HYV rice seeds market and trade is thriving. Following informally traded rice seeds' varieties were identified: BR-11, BRRRI Dhan-28, BRRRI Dhan-29 (Bangladeshi varieties in India); and Swarna, Parijat, Somsor, Swampa, Mamun, Minikit (Indian varieties in Bangladesh). Points from where informal trade of rice seeds occurs are as follows: Jiban Nagar, Jessore, Beanpole-Petrapole, Kushtia, Pragpur, Khulna, Darshana, Rajshahi, Godagiri, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Burimari and Chapai Nawabganj.

## 3. Achievements of Project

### *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)*

3.1 An MoU was signed between the National Seed Association of India (NSAI) and Bangladesh Seed Association (BSA). The content of MoU was shaped by CUTS in consultation with NSAI and BSA. With the signing of this MoU, both organisations will share country-specific information relating to seed industry on regular basis. It will also create an enabling environment for increased cooperation to formalise trade and knowledge-sharing between government agencies, research institutions engaged in seed production. Furthermore, both will also work towards the harmonisation of seed policies and regulations in two countries. NSAI and BSA will also



make efforts towards mutual recognition of existing and newly released varieties by respective governments in two countries.

3.2 MoU will be of a great significance because it will increase understanding on seed production, trade issues and regulatory barriers. MoU is also important because exchange of seeds is not only historic but also part of culture. As Bangladesh faces supply-side constraints in production of quality seeds, collaboration with International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and India could be highly useful. This meeting and signing of MoU is timely as both countries face challenges of food-security. A significant rise in yield, increase in productivity and exploration of food basket for cross-border trade is necessary and this MoU can serve the need for this.

### ***Awareness Generation***

3.3 Advocacy and awareness for cross-border trade and knowledge-sharing was done through a number of awareness generation methods. Some of these include: A TV talk show was organised in Dhaka on RTV, where A K Enamul Haque, Mahfuz Kabir and Anwar Faruque (Additional Secretary, Director General, Seed Wing, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh) discussed various issues related to cross-border HYV rice seeds' trade.

3.4 A documentary was produced to showcase opportunities and challenges in HYV rice seeds trade where a number of key stakeholders comprising representatives from NSAI and BSA; other government officials; seeds' traders and dealers; and last but not the least farmers (rice seeds growers) expressed their views on the accessibility and availability of seeds and prevalence of informal trade between Bangladesh and India.

3.5 A media coverage booklet was published which covered 60 news items and articles published in English, Hindi, Oriya and Bengali print media. It aims to serve as a useful reference resource document for understanding developments that has happened in the course of RISTE's journey.

3.6 Awareness was also generated through *Kissan Goshthis* and by forming farmers groups to get registered in various schemes of local government, for instance, in Bihar farmer groups were successful to achieve benefits of *Mukhyamantri Beej Vistaar Yojna*, under which they got subsidised seeds.

3.7 A consensus was made between government officials in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade and Industry in both the countries, seeds associations, research institutions and private companies that informal trade of HYV rice seeds is a major issue and can be resolved by continuous efforts, specifically through knowledge-sharing.

### ***Role in Other Initiatives***

3.8 It was also discussed in the meeting that although Bangladesh and India have achieved a significant level in the production of quality seeds yet state- and variety-specific shortage is annually faced by both the countries. These shortages give boost to informal trade of seeds across states and borders. This is also partly due to a number of non-tariff or regulatory barriers in cross-border trade of agricultural inputs. Both the

countries are trying to resolve this issue with the help of various national and international organisations, such as IRRI.

3.9 In this context, the Government of India have notified four Bangladeshi rice varieties (BINA Dhan-8, BINA Dhan-10, BINA Dhan-11, and BINA Dhan-12) with the collaboration of IRRI and will be used as Certified Seeds/Truthfully Labelled Seeds in three Indian states, namely West Bengal, Assam and Odisha. After testing for one year these seeds can also be used in other Indian states. Widespread use of Bangladeshi rice seeds, such as BRRI Dhan-29, BR-11 in India and Indian varieties such as Swarna and Miniket in Bangladesh is not new now.

3.10 An agreement was signed between the governments of India, Nepal, Bangladesh and IRRI to release some specific HYV rice seeds varieties in each other countries. This project played an indirect but important role as it created a platform for various stakeholders to discuss the issue of HYV rice seeds and bring it forward in public domain.

#### **4. The Way Forward**

##### ***Challenges***

4.1 Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) issues, quarantine issues, issues related to IPRs, transfer of material and breeder seeds and technology sharing needs to be addressed. It is almost impossible to remove SPS regulations because of commitment to the WTO, but a workable solution or a framework of cooperation can be made.

4.2 Indian export to Bangladesh has been superseded by China in recent years. Similarly, India is not in the top export destination of Bangladesh.

4.3 As governments in both the countries lack proper infrastructure to supply seeds, hence involvement of private sector becomes crucial in this context. A significant step in this direction can be initiation of single point infrastructure for cross-border trade and joint testing system can be a solution.

4.4 Some of the governments in Eastern Indian states, such as Odisha have started regulatory barriers on the production and movement of seeds from one place to other. This can set a wrong precedence for the easy exchange of seeds.

##### ***Further Work***

4.5 Awareness generation among farmers for use of quality seeds should continue as they do not bother about border laws and pay attention on brand name of seeds. Regular dialogues with key government officials, research institutions and other relevant stakeholders should continue in order to move forward the goal of cross-border trade and knowledge-sharing.

4.6 It is necessary to involve South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) level institutions such as SAARC Seed Bank, SAARC Agriculture Centre etc. in the process of advocacy and awareness generation as they can play a major role in the formalisation of trade and knowledge-sharing.

4.7 There have been instances of informal trade of other seeds, such as vegetable particularly in the bordering areas of West Bengal. Apart from that, there are a significant number of farmers who grow hybrid seeds. These issues also need consideration in future through a thematically-designed research and advocacy work.