

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

April 19-20, 2013, Kolkata

Report of the Project Launch Meeting

1. Introduction

On 19th and 20th April 2013, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS International) organised a two-day Launch Meeting of the project entitled *Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh* (RISTE) in Kolkata. It is supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and will be implemented over a period of 21 months (January 2013-September 2014), across the four eastern Indian states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal) and Bangladesh.

It is an attempt to highlight the issues related to the inflow and outflow of quality rice seeds in the four eastern states of India and in Bangladesh. In addition to it, since both the eastern part of India and Bangladesh share similar agro-climatic conditions, the project seeks to explore how the two countries can cooperate and collaborate in improving rice yields in both the sides of the border through formal rice seeds trade.

The project through the generation and dissemination of advocacy documents, policy briefs, and policy advocacy messages will conclude with a forward-looking agenda on regulatory matters for enhancing rice seeds trade between India and Bangladesh including an agenda for cooperation on larger issues of agriculture development in both the countries.

2. Objectives

The major objectives of the Project Launch Meeting were to:

- ensure that the project team, prospective project partners, Project Advisory Committee and other relevant stakeholders are on to the same page as far as project activities, outputs and outcomes are concerned;
- deliberate and share views in generating awareness and understanding on major issues/barriers on rice seeds marketing/trade in eastern India and in Bangladesh;
- the pathway in harmonization the regulations in the rice seeds trade from both the nations to enhance and facilitate the trade relations;
- present the issues relating to rice seeds trade between India and Bangladesh at a wider level targeting policy makers, institutions and media.

3. Participants

The meeting was attended by more than 50 participants from India and Bangladesh comprising members of the Project Advisory Committee, prospective project partners, government officials, subject experts, other relevant stakeholders such as rice seed traders, representatives of the media, and CUTS representatives who will be involved in this project.

4. Meeting Report

The Project Launch meeting was a one and half day affair where all the participants and their interactive participation in bringing forth the issues related to rice seeds concerning their areas of specialization, was not only helpful for the project but also made this meeting achieve its intended objectives. The meeting was focused on revising the work plan and the results framework keeping with the dynamicity and importance of this subject it commanded a thorough discussion through-out the meeting, which not only helped in aligning all the key stakeholders and participants but also helped in redefining the area of scope for this project, making it more inclusive and focused.

The Project Launch Meeting was divided into three half days sessions.

Session I

The first opening session, where all the three panellist Mr Bipul Chatterjee, Deputy Executive, CUTS International, Sudhir Chandra Nath, Head, Agriculture and Food security program, BRAC centre, Bangladesh, and Ms Abida Islam, Deputy High Commissioner of Bangladesh, Bangladesh High Commission, Kolkata, introduced the problems faced by both India and Bangladesh, in availability and accessibility of quality rice seeds by their large marginal section of the farming community. They all agreed on the potential benefits that both India and Bangladesh can derive from mutual cooperation and the importance of the same in the wake of climatic and food security challenges faced by both the countries in similar ways.

Mr Chatterjee briefed the meeting about the meeting agenda for the coming sessions and the findings from the preliminary literature review carried out by the project team, setting the background for further discussions and clarifications.

Following are the messages emerged out of the opening session;

- Two major objectives of this projects will be 1) look at the seeds flows in four states in India and Bangladesh, and 2) existing and potential trade barriers between India and Bangladesh
- It was agreed that there is a lack of political commitment from both the Indian and Bangladesh's Governments. However, there is an increasing change in this trend but still there is a long way to go to achieve conclusive benefits of the mutual cooperation.
- It was noted that in Bangladesh private participation in rice seeds is confined to hybrid varieties, considering the profit component in this sector. In Bangladesh Seeds regime there is a limited provisions for the release of high yield variety seeds- Private sector cannot release HYV rice seeds but that's not the case with the hybrid variety of rice seeds.
- There are instances of informal trade in the rice seeds across the border but at the same time there is non-existent formal trade happening and this is resulted from the lack of formal channels and lack of initiatives in formalising the informal channels.

- One of the major constraint faced by both the countries which not only hinders the trade but also act as a barrier to the availability of the quality rice seeds is the inadequate infrastructure and storage facilities. It was suggested that there is an urgent need to increase the investment avenues into the seeds sector.
- In Bangladesh, rice constitutes 70 percent of total area under cultivation and absorbs 60 percent of labour force. The sheer importance of rice from the point of food security and livelihood generation makes it important that rice production and yields needs to be increased. Therefore, farmers are concerned primarily with increase in the rice yields and thus have heavy dependence on the Chinese hybrid varieties of rice seeds, in spite of reported instances quality of produce being below the desired standards.
- Three major parameters through which the issues identified should be categorised into are; 1) social, 2) economic, and 3) political parameters

Session II

The second session started with presentation by Mr Chatterjee on the Project Plan, objectives and outcomes. It opened the floor for exhaustive group discussion on the subject and led to the wealthy discussion on the project plans, results framework and other activities, forwarding it towards focused and sharper area of scope for the project. The session was moderated by Mr Sushil Pandey, Consultant, Former Senior Scientist, Social Sciences Division, International Rice Research Institute, Manila, and Mr Hari Menon, Consultant, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Following are the messages emerged out of the second session;

- The importance of this project is in bringing in focus the issues faced by both the countries such as; low seed replacement rate, unavailability of affordable price of quality rice seeds, shortage of quality rice seeds, low rice yield and emerging issues of climate change and its impact on agriculture productivity and devising policy and structural change advocacy messages initiating towards bringing in more conclusive results on the ground.
- It was noted that there are two issues that influence trade: 1. Uniqueness of the commodity and 2. Comparative advantage, they not only help in creating the relative demand for the product but also establish the ground for the exchange/ trade to occur. Thus, the project should come up with a brief study on the comparative analysis, setting the stage for the relevance and establishing the importance of mutual rice seeds cooperation for both the countries.
- There could be a number of varieties of rice seeds suitable in the agro-climatic conditions of both the countries. They need to be identified, by collecting secondary data from the rice research institutes from both the countries so as to facilitate their exchange. The variables which directly affect the exchange such as; land devoted to that specific variety of rice and the pattern, labour employed, the policy changes etc. all these variables which could have direct impact on trade needs to be identified and studied in-depth.

- It was noted that there is a clear benefit to both the nations from rice seeds cooperation. If this market is optimally tapped then it could be much bigger than \$ 5.9mn as estimated in the draft literature review.
- In order to stimulate any policy change, it was pointed that, there is a need to develop a strong business case- validating the volume and numbers on the real ground. It can only be accepted across the borders if it carries a win-win situation where no one benefits at the cost of other. This should help in developing a strong policy advocacy document which will bring in attention of the policy makers on the subject of rice seeds cooperation between the two countries. .
- The association that this project message will be advocating should not confine itself with the rice seeds trade only; rather it should be aimed towards enhanced cooperation between both the governments which can be beyond just commercial purposes.
- Success of this project will come from the identification of changes required in the regulatory systems and in highlighting the necessity of removing trade-related barriers hindering cross-border rice seeds trade.
- There needs to be a broader focus on the food security concerns of both the nations, which needs attention and cooperation on various fronts like political, institutional and regional integration. It was further suggested that, India should adopt a bigger food security policy taking cue from the South Africa which covers not only Africa, but also whole of Southern Africa.

Session III

This session started with, Mr Suresh P. Singh, Policy Analyst, CUTS International, presenting the recapitulation of the previous sessions so as to brief participants once again on the major points of discussion in the previous sessions. This helped in furthering the discussions towards much more results oriented direction.

The Groups were asked to prepare the presentations, which were presented by group leaders from five different groups, Fr. Amal Raj, Director, Bihar Water development Society (Group –I), Mr Akhuory Prabhas, State Head, Basix India (Group-II), Dr. Debdukt Behura, Professor, Orissa University of Agriculture and technology (Group-III), Mr Ashim Das, Programme Manager, Mukti (Group-IV), and Syed Al Muti, Program Director, The Asia Foundation, Bangladesh (Group-V), on their understanding and suggestions for the project results framework so as to make it more focused and quantifiable and enable further clarification and discussion on the subject. And lastly the remarks by Mr Raju Kapoor, Executive Director, National Seed Association of India, concluded the session.

Following are the messages emerged from the third session;

- The informal channels of the rice seeds trade needs to be understand in- depth so as to devise a model of formalising the system without adversely affecting the farming community and the livelihood generation of the stakeholders involved. The argument put forward for formalizing the informal channels, was that formal channels will be helpful and accountable in maintaining the quality of rice seeds when the seeds are flowing from one stage to another in the seeds flow map, unlike the informal channels where there is no

accountability and assurity of the quality.

- The policy message for adopting the quality rice seeds with increase in the seed replacement rate should focus on the fundamentals of the seeds adoption which directly depend on the grain quality, duration, and marketability of the same.
- It was pointed in the meeting that it would be beneficial to understand the factors which are enabling and fostering the existing jute seed trade between the two countries and from there deriving the lessons and lackings for the rice seeds trade.
- In order to develop any effective policy message, it was pointed that, the focus should be on the whole agro-nomic package instead of isolating one element out of the whole package. Because it is believed that all the elements/factors in the agro-nomic package support the effectiveness of each other for instance; seed will depend on the water availability, fertilizers used etc.
- It is important to enhance the capacity to produce seeds so as to meet the demand from the advocacy of the increase in the seeds replacement rates. The seeds multiplication rates should be compatible with the seeds replacement rates and the policy message should be developed keeping the whole system in mind, so as to ensure its effectiveness.
- It was informed to the meeting that, the GoI is planning to shift the rice cultivation from Punjab and Haryana towards eastern region of India, this will not only put pressure on the state governments to provide infrastructure support but will also help in developing the capacity of the rice research institutes in the states in increasing the quality rice seeds production and their introduction in the fields. One such similar movement in the sixth Five Year Plan (2011-15) of Bangladesh, was also informed in which Bangladesh's government is planning to bring changes in the land patterns devoted to rice cultivation and the focus is on increase in the yield to ensure food security of the country. It was suggested that the project should keep all these changes in view while developing the project plan and the advocacy document. Therefore, the results framework should be a live document flexible enough to include the important changes during the course of the project.

5. Conclusion

Bipul Chatterjee concluded the meeting by thanking the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for supporting this project, the members of the Project Advisory Committee for their active participation, prospective project partners for taking the challenge of fostering cross border trade in rice seeds between India and Bangladesh. He also thanked participants for their valuable comments, suggestions and fruitful discussion, and the CUTS Project Team for their efforts in organising this meeting and implementing the project. He reiterated that the factors responsible for hindering cross-border rice seeds trade between India and Bangladesh will be identified and enabling factors of cross-border will be nurtured and taken forward.

The meeting resulted in the tangible outputs in the form of revised objectives and scope of the project. The results framework and outcomes are made results oriented with quantifiable success measures for each of them.

The Action plans agreed to bring in focus and clarity to the project activities, output and expected outcomes are as follows:

- One day workshop in Jaipur, to finalize the results framework based on the outputs of the group discussions.
- The project partners will be asked to make their own state specific work plan keeping with the overall objectives of the project. And those work plans will be finalised in the Jaipur one day work shop.
- After finalizing the partners work plan, agreements will be signed with the respective partners.
- Media strategy to be prepared by each partner in the starting of the project. It should be kept in mind that media should not be involved at every stage of the project but at very specific points in the project and that should be clearly mentioned in the media outreach strategy.
- Meeting with the Joint Secretary (Seeds), Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, to understand the policy maker's perspective on the project and getting suggestion to make it more policy effective.