

Report of the Project Review Meeting

## **Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh**

(RISTE Project)

*Organised by*

CUTS International, Jaipur

Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2014

*Jaipur, India*

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### **1. Introduction**

1.1 A review meeting of the project ‘Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh (RISTE)’ was organised at Hotel Country Inn, Jaipur on July 18, 2014. The objective of the meeting was to discuss and review progress made by the project in line with the results framework. Another objective was to generate a clear roadmap for future planned and unplanned activities, and possibilities of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the relevant and similar organisations of two countries including apex research institutions and seeds associations.

1.2 The meeting was attended by more than 30 participants from India and Bangladesh consisting of research institutions, seeds associations, academia, subject experts, besides project partner organisations. Some of the important participants include Shahjahan Kabir, Director, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute; Uma Shankar Singh, Project Coordinator, Stress-Tolerant Rice for Africa and South Asia, International Rice Research Institute; Sanjay Kumar Singh, Principal Scientist, Indian Agricultural Research Institute; Mahfuz Kabir, Senior Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies; Debduddh Behura, Professor, Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology; Bipul Malakar, Professor (retd.), Jadavpur University; Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, Director General, National Seeds Association of India; Ashadul Amin Dadan, General Secretary, Bangladesh Seeds Association; Debjyoti Guha, Working Secretary, Bengal Seed Association; five project partners (Bihar Water Development Society, Bihar; Samrudhi, Odisha; Mukti, West Bengal; Indian Grameen Services, Jharkhand and Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh), and CUTS team members involved in the project in various capacities.

1.3 Major observations from the project review meeting are delineated below.

## 2. Progress and Findings

2.1 The project has made significant progress since it was launched in January 2013. At the time of project launch, there existed lack of clarity on issues that drive demand and flow of rice seeds, particularly high yielding varieties (HYVs), and factors that hamper trade and cooperation.

2.2 There was also lack of understanding on adaptable varieties available in India and Bangladesh. Over the last 18 month periods, the project has achieved a number of milestones, especially with regard to identifying challenges and opportunity in rice seeds at the state and country (India and Bangladesh) level. The project has identified opportunities and enabling for trade and knowledge sharing between the two countries. Some of the specific findings are listed below.



### *Factors that drive demand and flow of rice seeds*

2.3 The project findings list factors that drive demand and flow of rice seeds. Some of the major ones include lack of timely availability, low level of awareness on adaptable varieties, high price and low affordability, distance between villages and retailers' shop and inefficiency in marketing and distribution channels. Low level of private sector engagement is another major limitation.

### *Indian varieties popular in Bangladesh and vice versa*

2.4 The project has also been successful in identifying rice seeds varieties informally traded and used by farmers in the two countries. Some of the Indian varieties used by farmers in Bangladesh include *Swarna (lal, guti, sada)*; *Minikit (Zira Minikit)*; *Swampa*; *Parijat*; *Mamun*; *Somsor*. Similarly, in case of India, project findings show that many Bangladeshi varieties such as BR 9; BR 11 (BB 11); BRRI Dhan 28; BRRI Dhan 29 are highly popular among Indian farmers, particularly in the bordering areas.

### *Challenges to bilateral trade and knowledge sharing in rice seeds*

2.5 Discussions revealed that major challenges to bilateral knowledge sharing and trade could be broadly divided into institutional; laws, policies, regulations; and infrastructure related. Some of the major ones include: a) HYV rice seed is a notified crop; b) there is lack of understanding between two governments on knowledge sharing and trade; c) despite similarity in agro-climatic conditions, there are no efforts towards harmonisation in seed laws, regulation and policies; d) issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights; e) prevailing apprehension of local stakeholders (fear of external dependence); and f) industry's fear of market capturing by other party.

### ***Enabling factors with potential to promote knowledge sharing and trade***

2.6 The argument for fostering a regime of cooperation between India and Bangladesh is strengthened by existence of a number of enabling factors at both sides of the border. As revealed by the report ‘*Rice Seeds: A Study of Availability and Accessibility in Bangladesh and India*’ produced under the project and also indicated above, a number of Indian and Bangladeshi rice seed varieties have gained wider acceptance in each other. This is primarily because of high adaptability and farmers’ preference.

2.7 Some other enabling factors that call for cooperation in rice seeds between two countries include wider acceptance of issues and challenges relating to HYV rice seeds availability and accessibility and inherent potential for trade and knowledge sharing by stakeholders. Two other recent developments have also occurred in the form of: a) SAARC seed bank and member countries efforts towards harmonisation of seed laws and policies; and b) cooperative political regimes in Bangladesh and India.

### **3. Future Activities and the Way Forward**

3.1 Over the past one and half year, the project activities have been able to create huge awareness among farmers, seeds growers, seeds producers, traders, research institutions, NGOs and key government officials. Still the project has to cover quite some distance to strengthen and achieve common consensus between the two countries with regard to trade and knowledge sharing in rice seeds. It is to be noted that such an initiative has potential to spill over and could influence and create a cooperative environment in whole of South Asia.



3.2 During the discussion, while the proposed activities were reviewed, several new suggestions emerged. New suggestions require new plan and activities; some of these could be overlapping. Major activities that will be the focus of the project implementation in the remaining part of the project are:

#### ***Estimation of informal trade in rice seeds***

3.3 Even though some estimates exist for informal trade between India and Bangladesh, no authentic estimates of informal trade in rice seeds is available. For the present project to achieve its intended goal and objectives, it is pertinent to estimate the magnitude of informal trade in rice seeds between the two countries.

3.4 An attempt will be made by CUTS team in association with project partners to estimate the magnitude of informal trade in rice seeds. This activity will rely on a sample survey that will be conducted at various points on both sides of the border. Stakeholders under this activity include seed producers and dealers, and farmers. Interactions with other stakeholders such as relevant government agencies, subject experts and traders will also be carried out. This might also require joint field visit to Indian states and Bangladesh. The size, location of field survey and stakeholders for interaction will be decided in consultation with project partners. This activity is expected to be completed by the end of October 2014.

### ***Case studies of informal trade in Northeast region of India***

3.5 Case studies on informal trade will indirectly feed into the estimation of magnitude of informal trade. This will, however, focus on areas – northeast states of India – not covered under the project. In India, three bordering areas in three states, namely Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura will be identified for interaction relating to this particular activity. Similarly on the Bangladesh side, interactions will be organised in three adjacent areas with farmers and other stakeholders.



3.6 The findings from the interactions will be published as case studies and included in the final report to be produced under the project. This activity will be completed by end of October 2014.

### ***Inter-state seed flow mapping in India***

3.7 The project has successfully mapped the flow of rice seeds within the states in India and Bangladesh. However, it is observed that seed market in different states of India is quite complex – while some states are net importer (inter-state), others are exporters. In some cases, it is also noted that there is informal movement of seeds from one state to another (for example from Odisha to Jharkhand).

3.8 Many seed producers within the state (such as Bihar and Jharkhand) are often compelled to release seeds as grains for consumption. This is despite the fact that these states are net importer.

3.9 To generate a better understanding on seed availability and accessibility by farmers, a need is felt for mapping the inter-state movement of seeds. It will help in understanding several issues relating to farmers' behaviour and preference for different varieties. This activity will be conducted by project partners in India and will be completed by end of December, 2014.

### ***Awareness generation programmes***

3.10 Project findings clearly indicate that lack of awareness is a major obstacle to farmers' acceptance to quality seeds and their preference for traditional varieties. In a scenario of lack of awareness, farmers show greater dependency on traditional varieties. Their preference for traditional varieties compromises crop yield and production. Besides, there are several stressed areas in India and Bangladesh realising declining crop yields and farmers seem to have least preference for suitable and adaptable varieties that have recently come up. Specific mention might be made of stress tolerant varieties developed by International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). In addition, there is also need to build capacity of government administrative and extension services.

3.11 There is thus need for a sustained campaign to create awareness and capacity building on adaptable varieties in different parts of India and Bangladesh. Attempts will be made to create greater awareness on adaptable varieties. The targeted stakeholders under this initiative will be farmers, government officials, seed producers and retailers. This initiative will be either integrated with other future activities of the project, or a separate/independent campaign will be launched, subject to available budget. Special attention will be paid to periods preceding the sowing season. As a tool to generate greater awareness, *Kishan Mela* and *Kishan Gosthi* will be effectively utilised. This activity will be undertaken at the time of sowing season, as indicated above.

### ***Media outreach including TV programmes***

3.12 The project has been able to grab and generate wider media attention ever since its inception in January 2013. Altogether, it received about one hundred coverage in print and electronic media both in local and national languages, particularly English, Hindi, Bengali and Odiya. Since the project has now entered into the phase of dissemination and advocacy, it is now time that media attention is further strengthened and galvanised.

3.13 To galvanise media coverage, TV talk show and roundtable discussion in local and national languages will be organised and conducted in project areas in India (one or more in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal) and Bangladesh. Besides, efforts will be made to generate wider awareness about the project findings through adequate coverage in print media. This is supposed to be a recurring activity and might continue throughout the remaining life cycle of the project, subject to budget. This activity will continue till March 2015.

### ***Documentary film***

3.14 To enable the project to have a longer impact on relevant stakeholders, a documentary film of 8-10 minutes duration based on the major findings of the project will be produced. This will be used for wider dissemination of the project findings and to create greater awareness on the issue and the need for cooperation – trade and knowledge sharing – between India and Bangladesh. The documentary film will be produced in English and then translated into two other languages, namely Bengali and Hindi. Media channels for its telecast will be decided in consultation with project partners and advisers. This activity is expected to be completed by end of December 2014.



### ***MoU between National Seed Association of India and Bangladesh Seed Association***

3.15 Cooperation and collaboration between similar organisations in two countries is critical to achieve project goal and objectives. Keeping this in view, CUTS team in consultation with project partners and seed associations of two countries will facilitate signing of an MoU between the two apex seed organisations – NSAI and BSA.

3.16 It might be noted that a draft was circulated in the review meeting for comments and suggestions. It received several comments and suggestions. It is agreed that based on the suggestions received during the review meeting, the draft MoU will be revised and shared with the two associations.

3.17 Further, as suggested, after finalisation of the MoU, a small meeting of seed associations and relevant government officials will be organised, either in New Delhi or Dhaka. Such an arrangement (for signing the MoU) will bring in greater authenticity and sanctity to the MoU. The activity is expected to be completed by end of August 2014.

### ***Recommendations to ICAR and BRRI***

3.18 Recently, even though there are some positive developments towards cooperation, but knowledge sharing still remains an unattended issue between two countries. Any fruitful cooperation requires policy and practice changes with regard to new rice seed varieties.

3.19 To address the issue of lack of adequate knowledge sharing, based on the project findings, a set of recommendations will be prepared and submitted to the two relevant and leading organisations in rice seed in the two countries – ICAR and BRRI.

3.20 Recommendations will take into account the existing arrangements between the two and gaps there in. It will cover issues that need to be addressed to promote greater cooperation between the two organisations. This activity is expected to be completed by end of August 2014.

