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Issue Highlights

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Editor

Dr. Md. Younus Ali
Senior Technical Officer, SAC

Editorial Board

Dr. S.M. Bokhtiar, Director, SAC
Dr. Nasreen Sultana, SPS (Horticulture)
Graphics
Ms. sanjida Akter

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC)

BARC Complex, Farmgate
Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-58153152
Fax: 880-2-9124596
Email: director@sac.org.bd
Website: www.sac.org.bd

Regional Consultation Meeting on “Exchange of Rice Based Production Technologies and Value Chain Development in SAARC Member States”



The ongoing climate change process has posed new challenges to the scientists and demands a quick response from the scientific community for sustainable crop production and to maintain a balance between demand and the supply. Over the years, in close partnership with IRRI, SAC has implemented the “Identification of rice varieties tolerant to abiotic stresses in SAARC Countries” under the Stress Tolerant Rice for Africa and South Asia (STRASA) project of IRRI funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In this standpoint, the Regional Consultation Meeting on “Exchange of Rice Based Production Technologies and Value Chain Development in SAARC Member States” followed by an exposure visit were jointly organized by the SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, IRRI South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC), Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India during 13th – 19th August, 2018. The seven-days program was consecutively held in three separate places, such as, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh; ICAR-National Rice Research Institute (NRRI), Cuttack,

Odisha and Annamalai University (AU), Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, India with the following objectives:

1. To promote exchange of high yielding climate resilient technologies/varieties (STRVs) among the SAARC Countries.
2. To study and develop sustainable rice based food value chain system.
3. To establish vibrant rice based technology forum for policy dialogue and exchange of technologies and knowledge in line with SDGs of United Nations.
4. To organize exposure visits for senior rice scientists from SAARC Member States to IRRI South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC) and National Agricultural Research and Education Systems (NARES).

Among the SAARC Member States, seven rice experts from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka participated in the consultation meeting and presented papers on present status, challenges and way forward in climate resilient technologies and rice value chain activities in their respective countries. In addition to the status paper presentation by the country experts, several scientific papers were delivered by the professors and scientists of BHU, AU and NRRI. During the consultation meeting and exposure visit, participants got the opportunity to observed a wide range of rice related experimental fields and advanced research and technologies such as, climate resilient rice fields, Rice + Fish + Poultry farming systems and other activities in BHU,

Varanasi, NRRI, Cuttack, and AU, Chidambaram. Besides, participants had the chance to visit different archaeological and heritage sites in those places and were exposed to local culture, food, art, music, etc. At the end of the meeting following recommendations were underscored:

1. The responsibility for “Seed without Boarder” should be taken up by SAC, Dhaka in coordination with IRRI, other CGIAR organizations and NARES of SAARC Member States.
2. “Seed without Boarder” agenda should be proposed for 2019 programs and it is advisable to propose this agenda during the upcoming Agricultural Minister’s Meeting for approval and implementation by all SAARC Member States.
3. In line with the SAC-IRRI MoU, a draft MoU between SAC and IRRI South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC), Varanasi would be appropriate for cooperation in rice and rice-based agri-food system research & development, capacity building and policy issues.
4. Frequent number of consultation meetings, trainings and exposure visit programs for the Scientists, extension officials and farmers should be carried out by IRRI and SAC to facilitate the exchange of climate resilient rice based crop varieties among the SAARC countries.

The consultation meeting and exposure visit program was coordinated by Mr. Tara Chand Dhoundiyal from IRRI South Asia Regional Centre, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. While, Prof. Dr. P.K. Singh from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and Prof. Dr. R.M. Kathiresan, Director, Research and Development Cell, Annamalai University, Tamilnadu, coordinated from their respective Universities. Dr. Pradyumna Raj Pandey, Senior Program Specialist (Crops) from SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) coordinated the program and Dr. SM Bokhtiar, Director guided and participated the entire program in India.



Regional Training Program on “Proven Production Technology and Value Chain Development of Pulses for Nutrition Security in South Asia”

Regional Training Program on “Proven Production Technology and Value Chain Development of Pulses for Nutrition Security in South Asia” was jointly organized by SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), South Asia office, New Delhi, India during 12 to 15 September, 2018 in ICRISAT, Hyderabad, India.

The training program was inaugurated by Dr. Peter Carberry, Director General, ICRISAT, Hyderabad, India with the following objectives:

1. To develop inventory of proven production technologies and effective pulses based cropping systems in SAARC countries.
2. To facilitate knowledge sharing on improved pulse production technologies and inclusive and efficient value chains for food and nutrition security in SAARC countries.
3. To develop modules on “Training of Trainer (ToT)” and facilitate exposure visits of key stakeholders for improved pulse production technologies of value chains in ICRISAT, Hyderabad.
4. To learn from best practices for way forward through pro-smallholder policies and institutional arrangements to improve pulse value chain development in South Asia.



Thirteen researchers, extension officers and young scientists from ICRISAT and SAARC Member States (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) participated in the training. During the four days training program, a wide range of subjects related to the pulse production technologies, management practices, value chain development and trade related issues were covered by the experts. Participants were got an opportunity to visit the advanced in-house as well as field research activities conducted by ICRISAT scientists. Apart from the training and class room teachings, the delegates also got the opportunity to visit Kothapally watershed sites. Dr. Pooran Gaur, Research Program Director - Asia International Crops Research Institute for the Semi- Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad coordinated the program on behalf of ICRISAT, Hyderabad. Whereas, Dr. Pradyumna Raj Pandey, Senior Program Specialist (Crops), SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) coordinated the program from SAC.



Regional Expert Consultation on “Sustainable Rural Poultry Value Chain Model for Poverty Reduction in South Asia” through video conferencing

The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh organized an expert consultation meeting through video conferencing on “Sustainable Rural Poultry Value Chain Model for Poverty Reduction in South Asia” was held on 17 July 2018. It was a virtual meeting and the focal persons were connected through video conferencing. The main objectives of the meeting were as follows:

1. Easy access to reasonable price of the rural farmers through establishing market linkage with in value chain model.
2. Strengthening poultry value chain linkage

3. Helping wider dissemination of knowledge and adaption of poultry value chain model for profitable poultry business.

The meeting was attended by six experts from six different SAARC Member States. A total of six technical papers were presented by the experts. The meeting was inaugurated by Dr. S. M. Bokhtiar, Director, SAARC Agriculture Centre and facilitated by Dr. Younus Ali, Senior Technical Officer of the centre. After elaborate discussions, a good set of recommendations were made on different thematic areas for further intervention.



Director, SAC facilitating the consultation meeting

Recommendation on Policy Issues

1. Reduce monopoly in parent stock by increasing licenses for parent stock importers.
2. Control of antibiotics use – regulating the use of antibiotics by transitioning in biological or other natural controlling methods.
3. Provide better disease diagnostic facilities and awareness.
4. Developing robust marketing system to avoid forced sales.
5. Increased and frequent coordination among SAARC Countries.
6. Encourage and engage youths and women in rural poultry farming activity through a rural credit facility.
7. Develop good market information within the country and regional market information system linking domestic market with SAARC member countries.
8. A strong policy on promotion and conservation of indigenous poultry from the member country and as a whole in the SAARC country (One approach to conserve the indigenous poultry breed).
9. Support to backyard farmers for supplying Day Old Chick (DOC), feed and housing materials.
10. Establish contract farming in broiler production as well as backyard poultry .



Research Issues

1. Value addition and reduce input cost (feed, labor, electricity, water, medicine, diagnostics etc).
2. Better local/backyard/free range breeds development (preferably genetic markers based selections).
3. Improved disease control by natural and biological means. Enhance the capacity of researcher/scientist involved in poultry through information sharing among SAARC member states, seminars, workshop and instituting SAARC poultry journal.
4. Study in detail the poultry value chain in Bhutan to find out the gaps and constraints involving different stakeholders.
5. Impact of commercialization of poultry farms on the rural poultry farming communities.
6. R&D to develop a climate resilient breed from the existing indigenous breed by sharing expertise among the SAARC countries.
7. Development of thermostable vaccines for the rural backyard poultry where cool chain could not be maintained.
8. Development of sustainable climate resilient poultry breeds.
9. Gene bank of indigenous poultry breeds should be established.

Extension Issues

1. Intensive and regular short trainings for farmers and specifically ladies involved in this sector.
2. Disease awareness and control.
3. Easy access to information.
4. Enhance the capacity of rural farming communities by providing hands on training in poultry farm management, poultry value chain and marketing aspect.
5. Enhance the capacity of field extension officers by providing advance training in poultry management and new technologies.
6. Institute a country exchange program (field extension and rural poultry farmers) among the SAARC countries to provide a platform to learn by seeing and exposure.

7. The government will ensure poultry vaccine especially for common poultry diseases like Newcastle Disease and Fowl Pox with free of cost through extension services.

8. Well organized links should be established between researchers, extension officers and farmers for the identifications of gaps for research and adopting research output for development.

9. Use of non-electric chick brooder developed by Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute in remote areas for proper brooding of chicks.

10. Technology transfer to enhance bio-security for rural poultry farming.

Regional Training on Development of Mass Breeding and Culture Techniques of catfishes

The SAARC Regional Training Program on 'Mass breeding and culture techniques of catfishes' was conducted at ICAR- Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIFA), Bhubaneswar, India during 16-21 July 2018. The training was jointly organized by the SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture, Bhubaneswar and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, with objectives:

2.To Train and demonstrate breeding techniques of some selected high valueed Asian catfishes vz., C. Batrachus, P. Pangasius and H. Brachysoma etc.

3.To demonstrate of hatchery rearing/culture techniques for mass seed production of catfishes for diversification of aquaculture and species conservation in South Asia.

A total of 14 participants including researchers, fish hatchery owners and fisheries and aquaculture specialists from five SAARC member states (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) attended the training.



During the 6 days training program a wide range of subjects related to catfish breeding and culture were covered by the expert resource persons. More than 60% of the curriculum was practical training, through learning by doing approach.

Apart from the training and class room teachings the delegates got opportunity to visit different archeological and heritage sites. They were exposed to local culture, food, art, music, handicrafts etc.

Dr. Sangram Ketan Sahoo, Principal Scientist, and Dr. B. R. Pillai, Director (In charge) coordinated the program at ICAR-CIFA. The program was visited by the Deputy Director General (Fisheries Science), ICAR. Dr. Shiba Shankar Giri, Senior Program Specialist (Fisheries), SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) coordinated the program and led the SAARC delegation to India.

Regional Training on Integrated Nutrient Management for Improving Soil Health and Crop Productivity

SAC organized a training program on “Integrated Plant Nutrient Management System in SAARC countries” in collaboration with ICAR-Indian Institute of Soil Science, Bhopal and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) at ICAR-IISS, Bhopal on 5-10 September, 2018. The 14 participants including researchers and departmental officials from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka participated in the training program. The objective of this training was to share ideas, commonalities and solutions among the researchers and other stakeholders of the SAARC countries relating to integrated plant nutrient management system for improving soil health and crop productivity.

An inaugural ceremony of the training program was conducted on 6th September, 2018. Dr. Pradip Dey, Course Director welcomed the dignitaries and delegates and briefed about the objectives and contents of the Regional Training Program. He further opined that the deliberations in the program comprising of both theory and practical sessions will be mutually beneficial to the participants as well as to the host faculty. Dr. J. K. Saha, Director of the ICAR-IISS provided a brief about the Institute activities and achievements. Ms. Fatema Nasrin Jahan, Senior Program Officer of SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh called for upholding the spirit of SAARC cooperation.



In his address, the Chief Guest of Inaugural Session, Dr. S.K. Chaudhari, Assistant Director General (Soil & Water Management), ICAR emphasized the importance of such regional cooperation in the field of natural resource management. He highlighted imbalanced use of chemical fertilizers in most of the SAARC countries and its long term impact. Dr. Chaudhary also urged to develop the regional IPNS module for improvement of soil health.

He also highlighted the ICAR initiative for strengthening the regional cooperation in agricultural sector. Dr. S.S. Khanna, the chairperson of the inaugural function calls for holistic approach of nutrient management for improvement of the fate of farmers in SAARC countries. The program was concluded with a formal vote of thanks. Assembled dignitaries released a training manual (Lectures & Practical guide) in the occasion, which were distributed of each participant later.

Regional Consultation on Women's Empowerment for Agriculture Development in South Asia: Enabling Policies

The SAARC Regional Expert Consultation meeting on "Women's Empowerment for Agriculture Development in South Asia: enabling policies" was conducted at ICAR- Central Institute of Women in Agriculture (ICAR-CIWA), Bhubaneswar, India on 5-7 September 2018 subsequent to the approval of 11th SAC GB and 54th PC, SAARC Agriculture Centre. The expert consultation meeting was jointly organized by the SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, Asian Farmers Association (AFA), ActionAid Bangladesh, ICAR-Central Institute of Women in Agriculture, Bhubaneswar and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, with objectives:

1. To analyze the gender related concerns in the agriculture in South Asia.
2. To review the prevailing policies and programs for empowerment women and engaging them in agricultural development process.
3. To propose policies and strategies contributing to enabling environment for engagement of women in agriculture.



An inaugural function of the consultation meeting was held on 5 September 2018 at CIWA. Smt. Krishna Raj, Minister of State for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, New Delhi, India graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Dr. Trilochan Mohapatra, Secretary DARE & DG, ICAR, New Delhi, India presided over the inaugural session. Dr. Narendra Singh Rathore, Deputy Director General (Agril. Education), ICAR, New Delhi, India Ms. Farah Kabir, Action Aid Bangladesh, and Ma. Estrella Penunia, Secretary General, AFA and were also present in the inaugural session as Guest of honour. Dr. Md. Younus Ali, Senior Technical Officer, SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) coordinated the program and led the SAARC delegation to India. Dr. Santosh Kumar Srivastava, Director, ICAR-CIWA welcomed all dignitaries, guests and participants in the seminar. Dr. Lipi Das, Principal Scientist, coordinated the program at ICAR-CIWA. The program was visited by the Assistant Director General, ICAR.

The researchers of CIWA, Farmer Organizations and professionals from SAARC member states-Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka participated in the consultation meeting. During the three days program, seven Member Countries presented the country status report on the issue. Some farmer organizations also shared successful initiatives on woman in agriculture. Apart from the consultation meeting, the delegates got opportunity to visit different women in agriculture model. After elaborate discussions, a good set of recommendations were made on different thematic areas for further intervention.

Major recommendations to empower women farmers in South Asia

- Women play a major role in agriculture activities both directly and indirectly, along with their household responsibilities and socio-cultural obligations (care economy) in South Asia. Their contribution extent from promoting regional food security to care economy. Though all countries of South Asia are giving emphasise on women empowerment issues in agriculture but the findings show that it is not enough as required. Therefore SAC and its member countries need

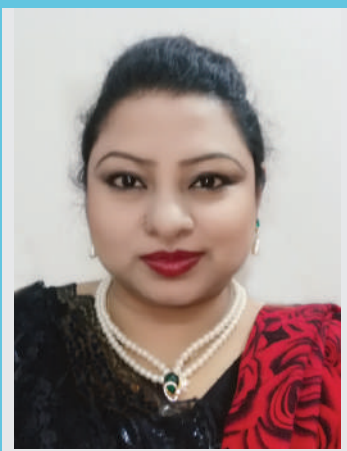
to lay down specific policy recognising women farmers, their contribution in agriculture and economy and set specific programme interventions for their development.

- Set up an institutional mechanism for scaling out and scaling up the issues of women farmers in all SAARC member countries. For example, CIWA- Central Institute for Women in Agriculture in India is a government institute fostering women farmers welfare. It is a unique example of addressing the issues of women farmers institutionally. All participants of the expert consultation meeting came to an agreement that such institution is essential for all women farmers of all SAARC member countries. So it is a recommendation to all member states to set up such institutional arrangement to looking after the issue of women farmers.

- Women farmers of South Asia are burdened with household care work and agriculture work. This is very common scenario in all member states of SAARC. This is call double burden for women. As result they are suffering from time poverty. They are not getting enough time to earn and income. Engagement in household care work confines women in household periphery and creates barriers to attend in paid work and getting access to market with their agriculture products. On the other hand these household care works i.e. cooking, cleaning and washing, child and elderly/sick person care, water and fuel/firewood collection remain unrecognised and unpaid. In this consultation meeting, all countries and farmers raised the issue and recommended for recognition, reduction and redistribution of household care work in SAARC member countries with specific policies and development programme. It is worthwhile to mention here that recognition and valuation of unpaid care work/household care work is one of the target of Sustainable Development Goals. Hence it is essential for all member states to take steps to count this unpaid care work in national GDP.

- In South Asia, 80% of the total agriculture produces come from smallholder farmers and most of them are women farmers. But it come out from the consultation that they have less access to extension services as it is not gender friendly, particularly women farmers friendly. So it is essential to review existing policies or development programme interventions and or introduce new policies in regional and national level to promote access of women smallholder farmers in support mechanism and extension services for agriculture development.

- Participation of women in the agricultural sector has increased over time in South Asia. The trend shows that the percentage of women as unpaid labour in agriculture is reducing but still it is more than men (in Bangladesh it has reduced by 2015 but still constitute 56.3% while for men it is only 7.7%). Such contributions of women farmers is not considered in national account system, development programme and policies. Hence, for women farmers empowerment, needs to address counting of women farmers and their contribution whether it is paid or unpaid in the national system of account.
- Women agriculture labourers are getting less wages than men in South Asia. Even in some countries it half of men agricultural labourers. Hence it is important to review the national agriculture policies to ensure the welfare and development of women agricultural labourers.
- Marketing is a big issue where men are playing major roles: women are producing and in market men only. Women have very less presentation in market and business in all countries in South Asia: Based on entrepreneurship status, only 16% of women are self-employed out of 66% self-employed citizens in Bangladesh and it is almost similar in India, Afghanistan, Bhutan Pakistan, Maldives with a little progress in Nepal (Women have access to local markets and hat bazar and Very small access to wholesale market) and Sri Lanka (Women have full access and control to village level and retail markets as they have to sell their products to meet household and personal needs). Specific policy and laws is required for increase women access to market and value chain and development of women entrepreneurship in all countries. Similarly SAC should have specific guideline for the member states with monitoring mechanism.
- Access to finance and credit is another major barrier for women empowerment in agriculture. It requires very specific policy and intervention in regional and national level for women farmers accessibility in finance and credit.
- Promote vocational agriculture education for women need to establish vocational institutes can enhance the capacity of women farmer's in agricultural technologies, inputs, and packages by providing mobile training.
- Climate change is one of the big threat for agriculture in South Asia. Women farmers are mostly vulnerable as majority with smallholds. They are the victims of climate change though they have no contribution to climate change. Beside different harmful practices are continuing in South Asia agriculture which contaminates water, soil, reduce bio-diversity, reduce soil fertility. It will be big threat for agriculture in South Asia. Women farmers particularly women smallholder farmers are mostly sufferer for this. In this context the consultation has given emphasised on promotion of climate resilient sustainable agriculture. There should have specific policy and guideline for mitigating and adaptation with climate change - focusing women farmers of South Asia.



Graphic Designer Joined at the SAC

Ms. Sanjida Akter joined in SAC as the Graphic Designer on 27th August 2018. Prior joining here, she was Art Teacher under the organization of Russian Culture, Dhaka. She awarded Bachelor and Master Degree from University Development Alternative. She has a lot of experiences to work with various organizations as designer and artist.