

Sharing of current SRI field implementation status and minutes of the Extended SRI National Steering Committee Meeting

Venue: ActionAid Conference Room, Dhaka

Date: 12 April 2006

Participants of the meeting:

(a) Steering Committee members-

1. Mr. M.N.A. Dewan, Director (Training), DAE, Khamarbari and SRI Steering committee member, Dhaka
2. Mr. Gopal Chowhan, Executive Director, SAFE Development Group, and SRI Steering committee member, Dhaka
3. Mr. A. B. M. Ziaur Rahman, Trial and Registration Executive-Seeds, Syngenta Bangladesh Ltd. (representing Steering Committee member from Syngenta)
4. Mr. Mazharul Huq, Executive Director, Bangladesh Rice Foundation (BRF), and SRI Steering committee member, Dhaka
5. Mr. Masud Alam Khan, Coordinator, FoSHoL Project, ActionAid, and SRI Steering committee member, Dhaka
6. Prof. Muazzam Husain, Co-ordinator, SRI National Steering Committee

(b) The following attended by invitation to represent different organisations interested/involved in SRI:

7. Mr. Luther Das, Consultant, The Abacus, Dhaka
8. Mr. Parvez Zabeed, Associate Coordinator, ActionAid, Dhaka
9. Mr. Marcel Gomes, Officer Administration, ActionAid, Dhaka
10. Ms. Manashi Hazra, AC Women Empowerment, ActionAid, Dhaka
11. Mr. Khan Arifur Rahman, Associate Coordinator, ActionAid, Dhaka
12. Mr. Kabir Mallik, Associate Coordinator, ActionAid, Dhaka
13. Mr. Mofizur Rahman, Associate Coordinator-Agriculture, ActionAid, Dhaka
14. Ms. Anju Monowara Begum, Facilitator, ActionAid, Dhaka
15. Mr. Abdus Sabur Mia, Project Coordinator, RBP-Oxfam, Padakhep
16. Mr. Suman Das, Oxfam GB, Dhaka
17. Mr. Indu Bhushan Roy, Coordinator, FoSHoL project, ActionAid, Dhaka
18. Mr. Ahmad Salahuddin, Manager, Coordination, IRRI, Dhaka
19. Dr. Noel P. Magor, Project Manager, FoSHoL project, IRRI, Dhaka

ActionAid, Bangladesh hosted the meeting. The meeting had actually two parts: the first part included introduction and welcome by the host, and viewing the SRI video show (*Bangla* version); and the second part was the extended Steering Committee meeting.

The following agenda were discussed and agreed unanimously in the meeting. The minutes were recorded and prepared by Mr. Gopal Chowhan, assisted by Prof. Muazzam Husain.

Part I:

1. Introduction and welcome by ActionAid
2. Observing SRI video (*Bangla* version)

Part II:

3. Brief update on existing SRI activities in Bangladesh and in other countries of the world
4. Review and confirmation of the last steering committee meeting minutes and their follow-up
5. Discussion and approval of the SRI field visit report
6. Miscellaneous, if any

Agenda – 1: Introduction and welcome by ActionAid

At the outset, all the members present introduced each other for familiarisation. Then Mr. Indu Bhushan Roy, on behalf of ActionAid, welcomed the participants in the meeting. He also gave an overview of FoSHoL project goal/objectives and its geographical locations. FoSHoL-ActionAid has been working in 9 Upazilas of 6 districts with resource-poor and food-insecure households with assistance of its partner NGOs: ZIBIKA in Kurigram, UTTARAN in Satkhira, Jagrata Jubo Sangstha (JJS) in Khulna, SPEED Trust in Patuakhali, NRDS in Noakhali, and Voluntary Association for Rural Development (VARD) in Sunamganj.

Mr. Roy stated that the objectives of the project included increase in production, assuring fair price for farmers' products, sustainability of the project activities, improving access of participants to service providers and to common property resources, and improved documentation capacity. He also mentioned that one special characteristics of the project is the participatory methods used in selecting farmers and conducting project activities. Community empowerment tools are also to be followed.

Agenda – 2: Observing SRI video Bangla version

All the participants watched a 25-minute video on SRI dubbed in *Bangla*, which was developed in English by ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) in Indonesia. Every one found this video very interesting and useful to learn and apply SRI practice in the farmers' field. The practice of SRI techniques has been elaborated in a simple and befitting manner, which farmers would be able to learn and use in their field. The house felt that this video could be a useful learning aid for understanding SRI practice by field extension staff and interested farmers. The house was informed that Mr. Luther Das, Consultant, took the initiative in dubbing the video in *Bangla* with the assistance of Prof. Muazzam Husain and Mr. Gopal Chowhan. Mr. Robert Patton, a Consultant for ADRA, has borne the cost of *Bangla* dubbing of the video.

Considering the usefulness, and interest of the different organisations, the video will be distributed to different organisations for learning and dissemination of SRI practice in the country on a wider scale. Mr. Luther Das and the steering committee will make this video available shortly to the interested organisations. Prof. Muazzam Husain and the Bangladesh Rice Foundation (BRF) may be contacted by all those interested in getting copies of the VDO.

Agenda - 3: Brief update on existing SRI activities in Bangladesh and in other countries of the world

(a) Mr. Mofizur Rahman of ActionAid shared the existing status of SRI trials being implemented in different locations by the partner NGOs as follows:

- SRI trials are implemented in this season (*Boro* 2005-06) in 6 Upazilas under 4 districts. A total of 85 farmers (female farmers 41, and male farmers 44) participated during this season at Kurigram Sadar and Ulipur Upazilas under Kurigram district, Rupsha and Koira Upazilas under Khulna district, Bishwambarpur Upazila under Sunamganj district, and Tala Upazila under Satkhira district.
- Seedling age for different trials: 10-day-old seedlings in 35 trials, 12 days old in 38 trials, 14 days old in 8 trials, and 20 days old in 4 trials
- Plant-to-plant spacing followed was 25 – 35cm for different trials to find out which spacing performs better.
- Farmers are cultivating BR-14, 28, 29, and 35. Rice plants are in fruiting stage now. Farmers would go for harvest in May.
- Average tillers observed: 47-54 in the SRI fields whereas farmers' existing practice produced 20-24 tillers per hill.
- Effective tillers found: SRI practice 27-32, and farmers' existing practice 9-13 per hill.
- As a part of limitation, resistance was observed at the initial stage to convince the farmers since they are not familiar with SRI practice. Late start-up of irrigation equipment delayed the season. There was cold injury and some seedling damage in some areas. Farmers experienced more time requirement during transplantation.
- A monitoring format was presented that would help evaluation of the performance of SRI. The members present made some suggestions for improving the format.

(b) Mr. Sabur Mia updated the status of RBP/Oxfam-supported initiative of SRI being implemented in the char areas of Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts by partner organisations: SSUS at Sundarganj Upazila; Gaibandha/SKS at Fulchari Upazila; Gaibandha/AKOTA at Sundarganj Upazila; Gaibandha/GUK at Sadar Upazila; Gaibandha/ZIBIKA at Sadar Upazila; Kurigram, and OVA at Sadar Upazila, Lalmonirhat.

- A total of 13 farmers have been implementing SRI experiment in the char areas with a view to see the effectiveness of SRI in increasing rice production in an economic and environmental sound manner.
- The cultivated rice varieties are BRRI *Dhan* 28, *Jagorony* and some other varieties.

- Rice seedling age was 14 -20 days, and in case of farmers' existing practice, it was over 40 days.
- In case of SRI practice, 1-2 seedlings were transplanted per hill; on the contrary in traditional method, farmers planted 4-8 seedlings per hill.
- Rice transplantation spacing followed was 25x25cm; whereas in farmers' practice, spacing was 15x15cm.

Mr. Sabur Mia mentioned that in general the crop condition looks relatively better in the SRI plots in terms of number of effective tillers and plant growth. He stated that it is completely a new idea and challenge for the farmers in the char areas. Farmers are eager to see the results, and they might go for expansion if the outcome is positive.

After the presentations of ActionAid and Padakhep-implemented SRI initiatives supported by RBP-Oxfam GB, Prof. Muazzam Husain emphasised the importance of accurate data collection in a structured monitoring format for both technical and social aspects. He mentioned that at the end of the season, comprehensive reports should be produced by both the organisations. In this regard, he expressed his willingness to assist in report preparation process if needed. Mr. Mofizur Rahman and Mr. Sabur Mia mentioned that they are collecting information in a structured format on both technical and social aspects, which would help them to prepare the final reports duly.

Prof. Muazzam Husain stressed on human resource development for appropriate understanding and implementation of SRI in the farmers' field. He suggested for adopting a community approach of SRI for getting better results and participation of the farmers in the expansion of SRI. As such, farmers' result sharing session is important to convince them for expansion of SRI during the next season.

Mr. Masud Alam Khan, ActionAid, suggested organising a national seminar on SRI after the *Boro* season. He hoped that in the next *Amon* and *Boro* seasons, there would be larger participation of farmers in the working areas of FoSHoL project.

(c) Prof. Muazzam Husain updated the following SRI activities in Bangladesh and abroad:

- The SRI video produced in Indonesia by ADRA has been dubbed in *Bangla* and was ready for use as training aid by the interested organisations. He mentioned that it would be helpful both for the staff and farmers to better understand and implement SRI practice in the field.
- In addition to the Action Aid project, SRI is being implemented during the current *Boro* season with the active support of Oxfam GB. In this regard, he mentioned that the partner organisations of Oxfam GB have been receiving training and technical assistance from the steering committee for implementation of SRI practice with the farmers in their working areas. He mentioned that Oxfam GB would hopefully continue its support to SRI initiative if they find the current *Boro* season results positive.
- A draft project proposal on SRI was drafted after the field visit made last year (April, 2005). This proposal would be further revised for submission to potential donors for providing funds. In the meantime, as proposed by Prof. Norman Uphoff, the SRI Global Coordinator, a request has been forwarded to

- him for seeking a small amount of funds to cover overhead expenditure and carry out some promotional activities by the Steering Committee.
- SRI trials and promotional activities are being conducted in 24 countries in various parts of the world, which reveals that SRI is gradually getting popularity due to its effectiveness. In many countries, the Governments, especially the Agriculture ministries, have been providing support to such SRI promotional activities. A summary of institutions involved and progress made so far in these countries was presented to the meeting participants by Prof. Husain based on data provided by Prof. Uphoff.

Discussion:

A general discussion followed the presentations. These are summarised as follows:

- Seedling production in winter season and irrigation management still remained a major problem, as mentioned by most of the field staff and the farmers who are trying to adopt SRI practice. In this respect, Dr. Noel Magor mentioned that the timing of the cold wave for any particular area may be considered during seedbed preparation in order to reduce seedling damage. Prof. Muazzam Husain mentioned that farmers can think about using polythene sheet over their seed bed since only a little area is needed by a farmer for SRI seedling production. It was, however, felt that this particular issue should be discussed with the farmers, and some new ideas might emerge out to resolve this problem.
- It was mentioned that in most areas, irrigation equipment starts late in the season, and as a result, farmers could not go for early rice transplantation. In this respect, it was suggested to make a planning meeting between the farmers and irrigation equipment owners to start STW operation earlier.
- Prof. Muazzam Husain suggested the SRI implementing organisations follow a community approach for seedling raising as well as for better management of irrigation systems. Only a few farmers' participation in a command area will not resolve the irrigation management problem.
- Mr. M.N.A. Dewan, Director (Training), DAE, mentioned that he found that SRI is getting acceptance among the farmers, and field staff need to work closely with the farmers to address the social and technical problems in a participatory approach. According to him, there were now some problems like no timely preparation of seedbed; due to lack of irrigation, transplantation is also delayed due to non-availability of water in time. Thus, water management is a vital problem. He further added that government policy is now to increase yield by 25%. Adoption of SRI could be one of the means to achieve this goal. DAE cannot do much to promote SRI. There is no fund allocation for this – to train field staff and farmers and carry out demonstration plot programmes. He also said that it may be helpful to arrange field visits to neighbouring countries to see and learn from their SRI practices.
- Mr. Mazharul Huq, Executive Director, Bangladesh Rice Foundation (BRF) expressed his satisfaction on the better results of SRI practice. He mentioned that BRF would provide necessary assistance for its promotion among the rice farming community. He, however, stated that the DAE should play a vital role in promoting SRI in the country, especially for conducting training its field personnel and farmers. He emphasised that improved small implements like

rotary weeders and markers should be developed and promoted. He hoped that the government would come forward to do all the needful in promoting SRI, including training of DAE personnel and carrying out media campaign, which is needed for wider adoption of SRI at the farmer level.

Agenda – 4: Review and confirmation of the last Steering Committee meeting minutes and their follow-up

The last steering committee meeting minutes were reviewed and confirmed by the house. On follow-up actions, Prof. Husain informed the members that the task of dubbing the video in *Bangla* was completed. The field visit to SRI areas was also accomplished and a report prepared (circulated in the meeting).

The draft project proposal, however, has not yet been finalized. It was circulated to elicit suggestions for improvement. Some comments have been received, which would be taken into consideration in revising and finalising the proposal.

Agenda - 5: Discussion and approval of the SRI field visit report

The report on the field visit to SRI areas in different districts of Bangladesh, conducted by a team representing the DAE, BIRRI and the Steering Committee members, was placed for discussion and approval.

Dr. Noel Magor expressed his satisfaction that SRI was being continued by farmers in the PETRRA sub-project and other DAE areas. He informed that he would send a copy of the report to IRRI for information and possible action. He said that the report as well as the discussions in the meeting raised various issues for solution in promoting SRI in Bangladesh. These include training, water management, and seedling raising and transplantation problems. He proposed that if it is not practicable for farmers to follow all the SRI practices together, something in between may be followed by the farmers.

In this context, Prof. Husain mentioned that already in the SRI areas, many farmers are partially following the SRI methods and achieving relatively better results. However, to achieve maximum benefits from SRI, we should continue to strive for finding solutions to the present constraints by providing effective training, motivating the farmers through establishing demonstration plots and adoption of improved implements, and a community approach.

The report was then approved by the meeting.

Agenda – 6: Miscellaneous

a. Regularisation of the SRI National Steering Committee: Discussions were held on the question of regularisation and formal institutionalisation of the SRI initiative in Bangladesh, and renaming the SRI National Steering Committee. The participants resolved to rename it as “SRI National Network, Bangladesh” to carry on its promotional and coordinating activities in Bangladesh and maintain liaison with the global community. It was further recommended that the Bangladesh Rice Foundation

(BRF) should be its secretariat. The meeting also resolved that Prof. Muazzam Husain would continue his services as Coordinator for the SRI National Network, Bangladesh. The existing Steering Committee under the new set-up will act as the Executive Committee of the Network. Organisations, and individuals involved in SRI would constitute its general membership.

It was hoped that the network will undertake necessary programmes to provide information and data on SRI, help compile monitoring and evaluation reports for its members including gathering information from abroad, and maintain effective liaison with the global network on SRI.

b. Bangla nomenclature of SRI: The meeting also discussed on an appropriate nomenclature of SRI in *Bangla*, especially to make the meaning of SRI more comprehensible to the farming community. It was resolved to accept the term “*Shomonnito Dhan Utpadon Podhoti*” as the *Bangla* equivalent of SRI (System of Rice Intensification). Though the *Bangla* term does not exactly convey the dictionary meaning of SRI, the term accepted is considered to reflect the method more truly. Its meaning in English is something like “Integrated Rice Production System”. However, the system will continue to be denoted as *Es Ar Ai* (SRI) in *Bangla* in its abbreviated form, as it is termed globally.

Concluding remarks:

Prof. Muazzam Husain, in his concluding remarks said he was pleased to observe the lively interest and enthusiasm of the participants on SRI. The different participatory organisations are showing increasingly greater interest in promoting SRI in the country. He expressed the hope that the newly reorganised SRI National Network would get better support from the government, NGOs and farmers for addressing the food security problem in our country. He wished support from the different organisations and well-wishers of SRI will make its own space very soon.

Having no other points for further discussion, the meeting was closed with thanks to all present.

Prof. Muazzam Husain
Coordinator
SRI National Network, Bangladesh

Cc: All participants
SRI file