



Contribute to Better Rice Production and Nutrition in South East Asia

Better Rice Initiative Asia - Monthly Update

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Editor's Note

BRIA Promoting Better Rice, Better Life...

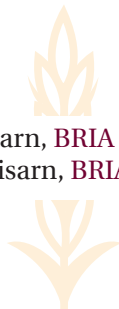
The BRIA project is coming to a close in November, this year. To share accomplishments and learning experience in the development context of public and private partnerships, BRIA-FARMERS held its culminating activity on 26 October 2017 in Quezon City, Philippines. At this closing ceremony for BRIA Philippines, the country team presented the project results to various stakeholders, showcased key lessons learned and recommendations, as well as discussed how to mainstream results by the public partners: the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), in order to facilitate sustainability of learnings.

Generally, BRIA-FARMERS aims to contribute towards achieving the goals of the Department of Agriculture which is ensuring food availability and affordability for all. In line with this, the project has sought to improve the market position of farmers in the rice value chains as well as their yields and incomes through better rice production, better market linkage, and policy dialogue and knowledge management. To measure the extent of the initiative, Kleffmann Group was commissioned to undertake both the baseline and end-line or post-launch surveys. The BRIA newsletter in this month is pleased to share some highlights of the post-evaluation results. According to this survey of 390 respondents in Aurora, Iloilo and Southern Leyte, participating farmers have begun to consider rice farming as a gainful enterprise and have been adopting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in their rice production.

The BRIA newsletter also covers the FARMERS Day, which was the last activity implemented by BRIA FARMERS in Region 8, the Philippines, to disseminate key BRIA modules relevant to farmers' needs, showcase best results of BRIA demonstration plots and provide a venue for farmers to exchange ideas.

Since rice cultivation is vulnerable to climate change effects, BRIA in Viet Nam has a target to promote climate-smart rice cultivation practices to farmers, especially in the Mekong Delta. BRIA recently held a quiz in Kien Giang province with members of 21 cooperatives from seven Mekong Delta provinces participating in. The competition widely propagated the climate-smart rice cultivation model within the provinces. Besides, it allowed farmers to exchange experiences to make rice production more effective and develop a sustainable market-oriented enterprise. BRIA helps cooperatives not only to improve rice cultivation practices, but also to develop alliances. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) plans to pursue a strategy that will forge cooperative alliances in the near future.

As a supporting association, BRIA exhibited at the 2017 Sustainable Rice Conference and Exhibition organised by the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) from 4-5 October 2017 at the United Nations Convention Centre (UNCC) in Bangkok. The BRIA booth featured success stories of farmers' empowerment in the four BRIA countries. As an SRP member, BRIA also shared lessons learnt from pilot testing and introducing the SRP Standard on Sustainable Rice Cultivation to farmers in Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam and the Philippines. The BRIA newsletter provides a summary of BRIA's contributions to this first global sustainable rice conference.



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BRIA-FARMERS in the Service of Local Farmers

The Philippine component of BRIA is better known as the Better Rice Initiative Asia-Fostering Agriculture and Rice Marketing by improved Education and Rural advisory Services (BRIA-FARMERS). More than a catchy acronym, it represents an ideal embodied in the general government direction of having sufficient supply of rice and food security in the long run. As intended, the project aims to help farmers be more productive and make rice farming generally profitable. In this two-fold purpose, the project is anchored.

As part of the implementation mechanism of BRIA-FARMERS, at the start of the project, Kleffmann Group (KG) was commissioned by Bayer Crop Science (BCS) to do a baseline survey on the capacity and training prerequisites of local extension workers and farmers. Assessing the training capacity and needs of the stakeholders and extension service providers implies that the project will not necessarily reinvent the wheel. Rather, the project will support the existing extension platform and infrastructure of the frontrunners of the rice extension works. The result of the said survey or assessment was used in order to package the training programme to be implemented by the project in the three (3) regions- 3 (Aurora), 6 (Iloilo) and 8 (Southern Leyte).

The project is nearing its completion in the Philippines. At the final stretch of its implementation, there is a need to undertake an end-line or post-launch survey to measure the extent of the initiative as may be reflected by key performance indicators. This write-up contains some of the highlights of the said survey. The survey has 390 respondents (150 each for Aurora and Iloilo; and 90 for Southern Leyte). The respondents were interviewed face to face using a set of questionnaire developed by the Kleffmann Group upon consultation with the implementing partners. The survey reveals a number of valuable lessons which are quite instructive, especially in terms of rural livelihood and development.

BRIA Philippines Priority Activities

BRIA Education and Training	BRIA Rice Production	BRIA Market Access
Strengthening of capacities of local extension service, i.e., LGUs and DA, providers	Introduction of enhanced farming technology concepts from seed to harvest.	Support farmer organisations' formation, improve market and price information.
Improvement of farmer access to extension services.	Focus on farming activities such as land preparation, planting, crop care and harvesting.	Link farmers to retailers

Fostering Agriculture and Rice Marketing by Improved Education and Rural Advisory Services (FARMERS)

The respondents and the knowledge they gained

The 390 respondents were, in one way or another, recipients of BRIA-FARMERS intervention in their respective localities. The intervention came in the form of participation in the BRIA School Days, BRIA-FARMERS Field Schools, technology updates, and discussion of specific BRIA-FARMERS topics in the demo plots. Majority of the respondents are smallholder farmers, with 1.5-5 hectares of land owned and tilled. On the average, the land owned by the farmers is 2.2 hectares planted not only with rice. Other commodities being commonly grown are coconut and mung beans. In terms of gain, the survey noted a great increase about farming knowledge among the respondents, from 44% to 67%. Most of the farmers recognised their knowledge about the growth stages of rice as a major knowledge gained. This specific knowledge guides better the farmers in deeper appreciation of the rice cycle and the concomitant technology and practice attached to each growth stage. Knowing the specific crop stage, a farmer is better guided on how to handle the issues in the field. For instance, based on the crop stage, a farmer may better be able to tackle the type of insect pests and diseases that may attack the rice plant.

The transfer of knowledge

The local government unit (LGU), through its agricultural extension workers (AEWs) and the local agricultural office, is the primary source of information or farming knowledge. The information provided by the LGUs is deemed important and useful by the farmers. The LGU is followed by technicians from the private companies and fellow farmers. The primary venue for knowledge exchange is the farmers meetings (in the form of field schools and technology updates) and consultations with AEWs and company technicians immersed in the fields. The LGU with its AEWs is also the main training provider. The learnings and the exchange in the trainings are further reinforced by the frequent visits by the AEWs and other LGU extension service providers. This is a positive trend given the provision of the local subsidy (LS), the primary purpose of which is to help in the extension work of the LGUs. From the average of 2 visits per year, the AEWs were able to visit 4 times on the average, almost doubling the frequency of the visits.

There is a noted increase or high incidence of trainings in the farm levels. Moreover, due to closer supervision of the AEWs and other extensionists, there is a higher adoption or application rate of technology learned and discussed in the trainings. However, there is still a certain percentage of farmers who do not adopt or apply the technologies learned. The reasons cited for this low adoption or application is the difficulty of abandoning the practice lived for countless years. There is also the reality that some of the technologies are not applicable to farms such as full mechanisation.

Furthermore, the trainings opened to farmers new opportunities to learn about new topics. While most of the topics are known to most farmers, the innovative way they were presented was greatly appreciated by the farmers. The topics given new appreciation by the farmers are the general rice culture (quite connected with the growth stages of rice); crop nutrition and fertiliser use; and pest management and the use of crop protection products. Due to the trainings, one major realisation among the farmers is the need for new and innovative rice farming products and equipment. The positive experience brought about by trainings and exposure to demo plots led the farmers to seek for ways they can be more competitive. Hence, innovative products and equipment are seen as one way to do it. As a complement to trainings in the fields, farmers prefer other modes by which information can reach them. Among these alternative modes are the mobile phones, radio and television. The latter does not necessarily have a cable connection for information to be disseminated to farmers.

Survey Specifications & Distribution of Interviews

Country	Philippines
Data Collection Method	Face-to-Face Interview
Sample Size	N=390
Cut-off Size in Hectares	Minimum 0.25 hectare / Maximum 10 hectares
Fieldwork Schedule	August 2017
Fieldwork Agency	KLEFFMANN GROUP

Province	*2016 Irrigated Rice Area	**Ave. Crop Size
Iloilo [N=150]	99,572 ha	2.2 ha
Aurora [N=150]	20,273 ha	ha
Southern Leyte [N=90]	18,975 ha	ha
TOTAL [N=390]	3,181,102 ha	ha

*Based on PSA 2016 Statistics

**Based on surveyed farms



The farmers and their investment

In terms of investment, the farmers spend heavily on labour and farm machinery, either owned or rented. The machines are mostly used during land preparation and harvesting. Other farm inputs also eat up a significant chunk of the budget. Expenses on seed are the least. For the farm inputs, chemical inputs comprise the bulk of farm expenditures. After the inputs, harvesting is the next most expensive.

For financial management, most farmers are able to segregate their household budget and their farm budget. Farmers are aware that the budget intended for the farm cannot be used for domestic allocation. The gains of the previous cropping become the capitalisation for the succeeding croppings season. In some instances, farmers resort to borrowing from private entities or individuals. These loans are usually paid after harvest either with paddy rice or money after selling the harvested paddy rice.

While most farmers express enhanced knowledge about the rice value chain, not all of them can claim better understanding (insecure) of the rice market. 75% of the farmers sell their harvest to private dealers or retailers. Private dealers are the main market followed by the government procuring entity and followed by middlemen. Farmers prefer to sell their produce to those traders who do not set their buying limits. One

important consideration why farmers sell to particular trader or retailer is if that retailer can pay in cash and immediately.

According to market demands, the farmers prefer rice varieties with tough or firm grains, as well as those varieties with solid grains. Such is the choice of farmers from Aurora and Southern Leyte. For Iloilo farmers, however, purity and cleanliness are more preferred characteristics of the seeds.

Crop insurance is availed of by the farmers because of its promise for financial help in the event of the crop being lost to natural calamities. The promise of cash assistance and refund are compelling reasons for farmers to avail themselves of crop insurance provided by the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation, the most preferred crop insurance provider. Nevertheless, farmers prefer that crop insurance be free or subsidised by the LGU.

Based on the survey, the project has brought about change at two levels--- perception and attitude. The farmers have begun to consider rice farming as a gainful enterprise. Because of such realisation, the farmers are now slowly rethinking how they go about their rice farming--- being more science-based and adoptive.





BRIA organised FARMERS Day cum Harvest Festival in the municipalities of Hinunangan, Hinundayan and Silago, Region 8, the Philippines. Funded through the support of the BRIA local subsidy (LS), the FARMERS Day was the last BRIA activity to be implemented after almost two years of LS support. The LS, as per contract, officially ended in September 2017, a month shy from the BRIA Regional Closing Event. The LS is one of the enabling factors for the smooth implementation of BRIA-related activities in these municipalities as it funds the salaries of the local BRIA coordinators who ensure that BRIA-related activities are in place, including various BRIA-extension activities. It is also worth mentioning that all BRIA activities in the municipalities, like the FARMERS Day, despite having funding support, have invaluable in-kind contributions from the municipalities such as time allocation for planning and farmer invitation, venue preparations, agricultural tools and door prizes for the participating farmers.

FARMERS Day continued to reach more farmers through (1) dissemination of key BRIA modules, with the help of trained agricultural extension workers and lead farmer technicians, relevant to the prevailing needs of the farmers, (2) showcasing best results of the demonstration plots implemented by this season's demonstration plot cooperators and (3) providing a venue for farmers to have the opportunity to ask key technical experts about farming related queries.

The event was held in sequence among the three municipalities so it gave key BRIA public-private partners the opportunity to participate in all the three activities, namely on 18 September in Hinunangan, 25 September in Hinundayan, and 29 September in Silago.

Farmer Participation

With all three municipalities combined, BRIA was able to reach the following 247 new farmers in Region 8:

Municipalities	Male	Female	Total
Silago	27	33	60
Hinunangan	47	90	137
Hinundayan	29	21	50
Grand Total			247

In Silago, the sound system used throughout the activity was connected to the barangay's public announcement system linking its sub-barangay districts.



BRIA Module Presentation

All three municipalities chose Product Stewardship Module as a topic presentation since municipal extensionists have noticed a lot of farmers still do not use personal protective equipment to protect their health and to handle chemical products safely and responsibly.

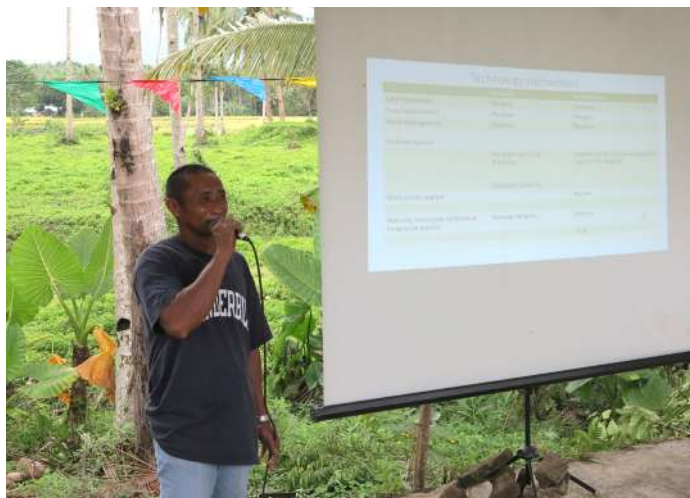
In Hinunangan, a significant number of farmers have voiced out the importance of having a good waste facility where farmers could safely dispose of their empty containers. Mr. Marlou Pan, municipal extensionist, reported that the municipality is planning to come up with a social marketing campaign with chemical companies offering the possibility for farmers to get a minimal incentive when they properly return empty containers. In the meantime, he urged farmers to make do with the material recovery facility and to further encourage other farmers to become responsible users. Hinundayan and Silago, meanwhile, will encourage barangay leaders to strengthen the enforcement of their material recovery facility where containers for special wastes are in place.



Open Forum

One common question that was raised by farmers in all three municipalities is the right fertiliser amount and application timing. Mr. Dalmacio Pajanustan, BRIA Focal Person from the Agricultural Training Institute of Region 8, emphasised the importance of accurate area measurement. He then pushed farmers and lead farmer technicians and extensionists who were trained by BRIA to assist farmers in learning how to measure their farms properly. For him, a lot of farmers are unaware of the risk of applying too much fertiliser because of the lack of proper measurement, not to mention the unnecessary expense. He highlighted that it is the aim of BRIA to educate farmers so that they will have higher yield which would mean higher income while reducing the costs.

In Silago, Mr. Junie Elmido, municipal agricultural officer, explained to farmers how they would benefit from BRIA. He clarified that this project is a collaboration between the private and public sectors aimed at providing a technology that when learned and applied will help increase farmer income. He encouraged farmers to continue seeking guidance from their office especially that despite BRIA project's closure, the municipality, through his office, will continue to include the BRIA modules in their extension system. He also announced the municipality's plan to award farmers who will be able to hit the provincial yield target. He believes that being educated by BRIA is an advantage.



Presentation of Demonstration Plot Results

All three municipalities each had for this cropping season 10 demonstration plots where the best demonstration plot cooperators were given the opportunity to showcase their results. Out of the 30 demonstration plots for this year's cropping season, 28 or 93.3% were able to hit the mark which is 20 percent higher than the average provincial yield. The average provincial yield according to the Department of Agriculture data is 4.24 mt/ha, hence, the participating demo plot cooperator should be able to hit 5.08 mt/ha. Ms. Emelda Omang of Hinunangan, Mr. Albino M. Lagumbay of Hinundayan and Mr. Jelson Aling of Silago were the highest yielders.

Meanwhile, the municipal extensionists encouraged farmers to be open and take the opportunity to ask these demonstration plot cooperators about their experience, so that they would be able to follow the showcased technology package.

Closing Messages



Dr. Vilma M. Patindol, Agricultural Training Institute Centre Director, congratulated the farmers of Hinunangan for showcasing their rice-based products and encouraged both the municipal trade office and agricultural office to work closely so that rice farmers will be able to match the demand of the market.



Meanwhile, Hon. Maximo Locop, Jr., from Silago Municipal Council and Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, extended its gratitude to BRIA as the project brought awareness of and knowledge on good rice farming techniques. He also mentioned that for the coming year, a big chunk of the municipality's budget will be allocated to the agricultural sector.



Lastly, in Hinundayan, Mr. Dalmacio Pajanustan congratulated the municipality for bagging P1 Million Pesos (Sixteen Thousand Euro) as the 2016 rice achievers awardee. He encouraged farmers to avail themselves of the fertiliser loan subsidy programme for which not only will they be able to have the subsidy support but also the right guidance from the municipal extensionists.

Moreover, Mr. Cristiano Bual, Hinundayan extensionist, invited farmers to attend the Farmer Field Classes for the next cropping season starting in October. He noted that learning is a continuous process and that farmers need to invest in attending such field classes if they wish to be able to effectively apply good rice farming techniques in their fields which would mean better yield, lower costs and higher income.





The More We Cooperate, the Better We Work

A quiz on ‘climate-smart rice cultivation’ was recently held by BRIA in Kien Giang province, Viet Nam. There were more than 100 participants including members of 21 cooperatives from seven Mekong Delta provinces (An Giang, Dong Thap, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau and Kien Giang), as well as representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs), BRIA and Integrated Coastal Management Programme (ICMP) Management Board. The objective was to promote to cooperative members, adoption of climate-smart rice cultivation practices in response to global climate change. The competition was effective in propagating and replicating the climate-smart rice cultivation model more widely within the provinces. This is one of the targets under the BRIA project in Viet Nam.

“The winning cooperative is not only outstanding, but must boast good alliances,” shared Mr. Tran Thanh Tung, representative of Southern Plant Protection Department. Mr. Tung participated in ‘the SMART contest’ as a jury member. He highly appreciated BRIA Viet Nam’s approach to promoting a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model. BRIA supports cooperatives not only in improving rice cultivation techniques, but also in developing alliances. The more ambitious objective is to assist cooperatives with gaining better access to global markets through both increased quality and quantity. Forming cooperative alliance is a strategy that MARD plans to promote in the coming years.

“The contest is interesting and challenging to participating cooperatives. This is a great opportunity for us not only to share our experience, but also to learn from others. There are a lot of other cooperatives who have very good knowledge of and experience in SMART rice cultivation. The reason why we won the first prize is that we have had good cooperation with other cooperatives in solving problems together. The jury shared this opinion with us,” disclosed Mr. Nguyen Van Luong, representative of Kinh Don cooperative, Ca Mau province, happily.

In the contest, Mr. Kohei Sakata, Managing Director of Bayer Vietnam, sent a message to cooperatives and farmer households across the country: “The impact of climate change is getting worse, especially in the Mekong Delta. In order to adapt to climate change, it is crucial that farmers adopt smart rice cultivation technologies. The contest is an opportunity for farmers to exchange experiences in order to make their production more effective, and develop a sustainable market-oriented enterprise.”





BRIA contributes to sustainable rice production in Southeast Asia with the SRP standard

BRIA shared lessons learnt from pilot testing and introducing the SRP Standard at the 2017 Sustainable Rice Conference and Exhibition held by the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) from 4-5 October 2017 at the United Nations Convention Centre (UNCC) in Bangkok. This event was attended by both SRP members and participants from the public and private sectors, as well as value chain actors, research institutions, international organizations, producers and civil society groups.

In this first global sustainable rice conference, BRIA as an SRP member staged a prominent exhibition booth supported by Bayer, showcasing the success stories of the four BRIA countries. Visitors to the booth obtained current and past BRIA newsletters to learn about

various interventions made to promote sustainable rice production, strengthen value chains, raise incomes of rice farmers, develop capacity of value chain stakeholders, and contribute to improved nutrition in this region. Interesting printed materials produced by the 'Competitive African Rice Initiative' (CARI) programme were also available to visitors interested in African rice production. At the BRIA booth, a series of five video clips entitled 'Responsible Rice Farming in Viet Nam,' produced by CropLife International in collaboration with GIZ to impart IPM (Integrated Pest Management) to Vietnamese farmers as well as a CARI video were shown.

To support the conference, BRIA made the following four presentations to the participants:

Presentation Topic	Presenter
“GIZ Lessons Learnt from Pilot Testing the SRP Standard”	Matthias Bickel
“Self-Assessment of Sustainable Practices with ICT”	Astari W. Dharma
“PPP on Crop Protection and Stewardship in Sustainable Rice Production”	Nguyen Thi Phuong, Nga
“Incentive Models to Increase Economic Sustainability”	Suriyan Vichitlekarn



Lessons learnt from pilot testing the SRP standard

With its expertise in farmer empowerment, BRIA has supported the development and adoption of the SRP Standard on Sustainable Rice Cultivation in the four BRIA pilot countries, through BRIA’s public-private-partnership (PPP) approach. As a starting point, BRIA has conducted pilot studies as part of the SRP’s multi-country field validation programme, to assess the applicability, relevance and acceptability of the standard to BRIA farmers.

In Thailand, the pilot testing covered an assessment of the applicability of the standard, farmer training conducted by the Thai Rice Department, establishment of an IMS (Internal Management System), and a group assurance system. In Indonesia and the Philippines, BRIA conducted farmer surveys to assess compliance of BRIA farmers to the standard and more importantly to pursue the SRP Standard as a benchmark for the improvement of the national Good Agricultural Practice (GAP). In the Philippine, the survey was carried out in Iloilo province together with IRRI (the International Rice Research Institute). In Viet Nam, the standard is used as a benchmark against which national standards are streamlined and to ensure that Vietnamese rice is accountable for the global sustainable market.

In parallel with its assessment of the applicability of the standard across countries and diverse rice production systems, BRIA is also facilitating linkages with potential buyers of sustainable rice, in order to promote sustainability and to support corporate sustainable procurement policies. BRIA will continue to gather more information and supply suggestions resulted from pilot testing to the SRP for improvement.



Various incentives models to increase economic sustainability

The SRP Standard serves as an on-farm tool that provides a sustainability framework and a foundation to build business linkages among value chain actors. The market plays a key role, thus the relationship between producers and buyers have to be established and aligned to drive the creation of sustainable value chains in both domestic and export markets.

Various approaches and business models have been piloted under GIZ-BRIA project sites, considering local practices and wisdom as well as local and regional policies. Most smallholder farmers are still very poor in Southeast Asia. BRIA is promoting sustainable rice value chains with a holistic approach from production to consumption. Various incentives were created by the project in various ways, such as the improvement of farmers' income through efficient input management, product quality improvement, better market linkages. For a better value chain, an accreditation standard on

sustainable rice cultivation is seen as one of the most potential solutions. To motivate farmers to adopt such sustainable rice cultivation practices, a direct benefit to farmers is necessary. Sustainable traceability system in the rice supply chain can create incentives for farmers, where the whole supply chain is dedicated to the certified sustainable product. Eventually, consumers at the end should pay the price of the product. Yet, another model is book and claim incentive mechanism that has been regarded as an alternative to give farmers an incentive for complying with the sustainability standard. In this model, the cost will be borne not by consumers, but by other stakeholders who are aware of the sustainability. BRIA is trying to develop a model that could bring the best incentives to farmers.



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