



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 contributing to the implementation of the SRP Standard

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In helping to strengthen Southeast Asia's rice sector, BRIA has facilitated various interventions in collaboration with different stakeholders. Beyond the project implementation, the BRIA Regional Secretariat is vigorously involved in various rice forums which can support the project in achieving its objective of raising the livelihoods of rice smallholder farmers.

The Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) is one of the most prominent of these forums, in which GIZ-BRIA is also a member. With a mission to promote resource efficiency and sustainability in the global rice sector, SRP aims to offer the global rice supply sector a proven set of instruments to facilitate wide-scale adoption of sustainability best practices. The SRP Standard on Sustainable Rice Cultivation – the world's first sustainability standard for rice, defines an overall framework for climate-smart sustainable best practice in any rice-based system. The Standard was developed by a dedicated SRP Working Group and launched in October 2015. At the same time, a set of Performance Indicators (PIs) developed by IRRI (International Rice Research Institute), was launched as a quantitative tool to measure impacts of adoption of the Standard, or indeed any other farm-level intervention towards sustainability. SRP is now focusing on a multi-country field validation programme of the Standard, PIs, and assurance system, an activity to which BRIA is also actively contributing.

BRIA has supported the development and adoption of the SRP Standard in the four BRIA pilot countries, apart from on-farm activities for farmer empowerment. BRIA has been conducting 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 as well as piloting the implementation of assurance schemes including the Internal Management System (IMS) for farmer groups in key rice producing countries. BRIA works with local authorities and private partners in these interventions. The results of the pilot studies in this year will be collected and provided as feedback to SRP in order to improve the Standard and refine the assurance system.

This year, pilot testing of the SRP Standard has been conducted in Thailand and verified through a 3<sup>rd</sup> party audit. The audit results demonstrated improvements in farm performance compared against the baseline. In Thailand, 28 farmers from Bua Ngam Community Rice Centre (CRC) and 43 farmers from Klang CRC have been verified as “working towards sustainability” (as provided for in the SRP's Communication and Assurance Guidelines (Pilot Phase). According to this independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party assessment, the farmers' compliance levels to the SRP Standard average 84% against the SRP Sustainable Rice Cultivation Standard. Since improvement at farm level may not be enough, BRIA believes the Standard will offer innovative business models to help strengthen business relationships among rice value chain actors and to enhance market linkages.

In Indonesia, an assessment survey was carried out by a local university at the end of August to early September in North Sumatra Province. According to this self-evaluation, BRIA ID farmers have complied at an average score of 68.7% against the Standard. The result of this study will later form the basis for further assessment by the Ministry of Agriculture on adoption of the SRP Standard in Indonesia.

BRIA has found that the SRP Standard provides an excellent and practical basis to guide farmers towards sustainable best practice. This is supplemented by the SRPs Performance Indicators that serve as a tool for quantitative impact monitoring. However, implementation of both is at an early stage; an assurance system, incentive mechanism, and also a verification system are currently under development; these tools will help ensure consistent adoption of the Standard across diverse production environments.

SRP members and users of the Standard are agreed on the importance of a collaborative approach towards sustainability. All in all, it can be concluded that the Standard has so far fulfilled its promise as a helpful tool to assess sustainability performance of rice farmers, and moreover, demonstrated its potential value when used in conjunction with the Performance Indicators as an impact monitoring tool to assess risk and identify areas for improvement.

BRIA wishes to thank Dr. Wyn Ellis, SRP Coordinator, for helping review this issue of the newsletter.

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# BRIA Piloting Sustainable Rice Cultivation Standard

BRIA Thailand and BRIA Indonesia have been actively participating in the SRP pilot testing. In Thailand, the pilot testing covers an assessment of the applicability of the Standard, farmer training, establishment of an IMS, and a group assurance system. In Indonesia, BRIA is conducting a farmer survey to assess compliance of BRIA farmers to the SRP Standard.

## Sustainable Rice Cultivation in Thailand

Thailand’s Rice Department (RD), BRIA Thailand, OLAM International, and Bayer have jointly initiated pilot testing of the SRP Standard with farmer groups in Ubon Ratchathani Province in the northeast of the country. Both Thai Rice Department and Olam serve on the SRP’s Advisory Committee, and Olam is also a partner in BRIA’s market linkages component. The pilot testing of the Standard in Thailand is also considered as one of BRIA’s interventions to improve market access for resource-poor rice farmers in this area.



Implementation Approach of Piloting SRP Sustainable Rice Cultivation Standard in Thailand

Two Community Rice Centres (CRC) have been selected to pilot the SRP Standard. The selected CRCs have been certified under the Thai GAP Standard, which focuses primarily on safety and quality. The scope of the SRP Standard is slightly more comprehensive than both the Thai GAP and BRIA TH recommendations, implying that most farmers should be compliant at around 80% of the SRP Standard. Participating farmers were selected on the basis of their familiarity with the GAP Standard, prior participation in BRIA training and activities relating to sustainable practices, their membership in a farmer group, and most importantly, their receptiveness to innovation and new technologies.



In 2016, pilot testing commenced with socialization with the farmers to give deeper understanding of the Standard itself. At the same time the organizing team from BRIA TH, RD, and Olam identified the risk of farmers based on the BRIA baseline study. It was followed by the internal assessment using the SRP data collection tool to assess the gap between farmers’ practices towards sustainability. Other activities included the establishment of an Internal Management System (IMS), risk assessments to define the areas for improvement, farmer training on selected critical topics, and regular monitoring of adoption of best-practice recommendations by the organizing team.

At the beginning of the program, the IMS team conducted a risk assessment of the selected farmers. Several specific areas for improvement were identified that required significant improvement in order to comply with the minimum requirements of the SRP Standard. The highest risks faced by farmers were found to be associated with Farm Management, Pre-Planting, and Nutrient Management.

## Training Thai Farmers on the SRP Standard

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In July and August 2016, BRIA together with Thai Rice Department (RD), OLAM International, and Bayer organized a Sustainable Rice Platform Standard (SRPS) socialization and training for the two selected CRCs. A group of 32 rice farmers from Bua Ngam CRC, and 45 rice farmers from Klang CRC who had participated in the SRP baseline survey in Bua Ngam Sub-district, Det Udom District of Ubon Ratchathani Province took part in this two-day SRPS training. The training consisted of ten modules, with the objective of enhancing farmers' capacity in rice cultivation and promoting sustainability in rice farming practices. Above all, the farmers are also encouraged to keep note of their practices in the farmers' diary that is developed for this program. The farmers' diary was developed in alignment with the Olam Farmer Information System (OFIS) that is adjusted for the sustainable rice farming following the SRP requirements.

The training received excellent support from the RD in providing experts for each module. In addition, ten Thai-language training modules were developed by RD in collaboration with BRIA and Olam based on the SRP Standard for this SRP Standard training, covering the following topics:

- 1 What is 'Sustainable Rice Production'?
- 2 Crop Calendar
- 3 Land Preparation and Management
- 4 Water Management
- 5 Nutrient Management
- 6 Pest Management
- 7 Harvest and Postharvest
- 8 Health and Safety
- 9 Labour Conditions
- 10 Moving forward to Sustainable Rice Standard



The training contained two more modules in addition to the SRP topics- an introduction to the concept of sustainability, and participatory assessment of the way forward. Using these modules, farmers will gain a deeper understanding of sustainability, and how they can improve their own farm management system to sustain their lands (environmentally) and their rice businesses (economically). Farmers reported that they had acquired a better understanding of the SRP Standard, and were also keen to adopt it in their fields.

Moreover, learning from the risk assessment of both CRCs, several critical topics were highlighted to farmers: crop calendar, heavy metals, salinity (Rq. 5), nutrient management (Rq. 15), inorganic fertilizer use (Rq. 18) harvest equipment, drying technique, storage, and safety instructions.

## Verification Process

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At the beginning of November 2016, an external audit was conducted to verify compliance of the two CRCs with the SRP Sustainable Rice Cultivation Standard. The audit is part of the SRP pilot testing on the applicability of the Standard. The audit verified that **28 farmers of Bua Ngam CRC, and 43 farmers of Klang CRC can be considered as “working towards sustainability.”** The independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party assessment also showed that farmer compliance levels averaged 84% against the SRP Standard. BRIA contracted UTZ to support the auditing process of the farmers in Thailand. OneCert was appointed as an accredited Certification Body (CB) who has been trained by UTZ to conduct the SRP audit. OneCert has already undertaken a similar audit for SRP farmers in India.

The audit was conducted on two levels- at the farmer level, and on the farm management level (IMS). The pilot testing was designed firstly to focus mainly on the farmers’ cultivation practices; however the management (IMS) forms a critical component to ensure effective implementation of the Standard.

After the Pilot Project Sanction of the IMS system, only 28 farmers from Bua Ngam CRC and 43 farmers from Klang CRC joined the audit. A total of 15 farmers from both CRCs; 7 farmers from Bua Ngam CRC, and 8 farmers from Klang CRC, were selected on the basis of total area to represent the CRCs. The results of the audit were very interesting and exciting for all parties, as this was one of the first SRP audits taking place globally. Both CRCs have reached around 84% of compliance towards the Sustainable Standard, with 2-3 missed-thresholds. The audit of the management system (IMS) was more challenging for the farmer groups, as the management system had only recently been implemented in the middle of the pilot testing. The IMS audit scored 19 points (out of 27), with 2 missed-thresholds on the “Farmer List & Agreements,” and the “Approval and Sanction System,” whereas the Traceability topic is not relevant as the audit was conducted prior to harvest.

The audit has shown farmers’ interest and capacity to adopt and implement sustainable rice cultivation practices. The areas have good soil condition and maintain natural resources. Farmers are also concerned about such issues as sustainability, food safety and environmental criteria. Lastly, the farmer group setup is strong and will be further strengthened in the future. Although post-training improvements were observed on the farming activities, especially in relation to farm management, some issues that still need to be improved are pre-planting and nutrient management. This year, the IMS has been fully coordinated by BRIA, RD, and Olam while in the following years, the CRC leader is expected to be able to take on the role of an IMS manager.

## Market linkages for Sustainable Rice

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The SRP Standard is also seen as a tool to improve market linkages for smallholder rice farmers. By following the Standard, buyers can be confident that the produce has undergone verification and that there is full traceability too. For the pilot testing phase, Olam plays an active role in arranging the best possible liquidity for the farmers from these two CRCs.

Previously, farmers sold their wet paddy rice to the millers, either directly or through a paddy broker. The millers would then grade the quality, especially in relation to moisture and contamination. The amount of money they receive from millers entirely relies on the quality of their product. For SRP certified rice, Olam has engaged with one specific miller, Ubon Thanyakij Rice Mill. The miller passes basic GMP requirements of a milling unit. The miller accepted to buy the entire production from all the farmers in the two CRCs at the most competitive price. The value chain was also shortened by avoiding any middle man (paddy brokers) to sell to the miller. The farmers are organized to produce the same rice variety and also to set up a harvesting plan in order to ensure that they can find adequate harvesters at the appropriate time to optimize grain quality. The harvested paddy was delivered directly to the miller after harvest by hired transport. To ensure traceability and that the miller does the proper quality evaluation at the time of purchase, Olam joined the process and provided intensive supervision to the miller.

The traceability process followed the “mass-balance model,” whereby the product is segregated at all stages from farm to mill, where it is mixed during the milling process. The proportion of the total tonnage that can be classed as ‘sustainable’ is the amount of verified sustainable paddy supplied to the mill by SRP farmers. This year the biggest challenge has been the limited volume of production from the programme, with only 400 tonnes of SRP-verified sustainable rice harvested. Nevertheless, despite falling global rice prices, the SRPS rice still ensured that programme farmers received a better price for their quality produce.

The miller also opined that the paddy from the SRP programme produced better grain quality since the farmers received close advisory support from the experts, including the facilitation to organise the harvesting plan with certain service provider for harvesting. The programme urged farmers to apply a crop calendar for better planning of all farm activities and the cost of production in the following years.



From BRIA's assessment with the first-hand information, the benefit of this programme affects the entire value chain in terms of product quality and environment. First and foremost, farmers receive free training from experts, helping them to produce more and more sustainable rice which would create a massive impact in the region. If growing sustainable rice is a new agricultural trend, Thai farmers will soon begin the shift away from their normal practice and embrace SRP best practices. Thai farmers are innovative, and readily accept new technologies when they see the benefit. Secondly, Olam will have an opportunity to export sustainable rice to export markets where consumers are willing to buy at premium prices. Last but not least, millers also benefit, due to the fact that they have an opportunity to sell milled rice directly to Olam.

Mrs. Lumpai Na-ngam has been cultivating rice all her life. As a member of Bua Ngam CRC, at Det Udom district, Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand, she cultivates her land together with her husband.



Mrs. Lumpai has joined the BRIA programme in early 2016, when Bua Ngam CRC was selected to participate in the SRP Standard pilot testing. She dedicated 30 rai (4.8 ha) of her land for the pilot testing.

After joining the SRP Standard programme, she has applied knowledge received from BRIA and the Thai Rice Department experts during the training to her rice fields, and she has noticed the difference. Previously, she faced problems with productivity and disease outbreaks, and lacked knowledge about the proper use of fertilizers. After attending the training, she is now able to apply fertilizers optimally, based on soil testing; productivity has improved significantly as a result. In spite of the current low international rice prices, Lumpai could sell her rice to the miller at a higher price than other farmers. In the future, she foresees the benefit of joining the SRP programme and is willing to invite other farmers to participate in the programme.



From the government's perspective, the Thai Rice Department views the Standard as a means of improving the national rice standard, and also to secure enhanced access for Thai rice farmers to participate in high-value export markets.

Ms. Pornsiri Senakas, RD Expert on Farmer Empowerment, suggested to BRIA that in order to promote SRP, incentive mechanisms should be developed to stimulate broad-scale adoption. There should be a follow-up programme after training to encourage farmers to apply the SRP Standard. Community-level quality assurance should be promoted. Farmers who can implement the SRP requirements should be awarded with a certificate. Rice produced according to the SRP Standard should be actively marketed to consumers to generate local demand.

Contributed by Astari Widya Dharma and Chatthep Chanyam



## Sustainable Rice Cultivation in Indonesia

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Under BRIA Indonesia, Farmer Field Schools (FSS) have been conducted to promote adoption of good agricultural practices. Comparing the training material for SRP Standard topics, almost 80% of the SRP topics have been covered by BRIA Indonesia training materials. The BRIA FSSs have been successfully conducted over the past 2 years and have involved around 2,211 farmers in Indonesia.

For pilot testing of the SRP Standard in Indonesia, BRIA farmers in North Sumatra, from the three districts of Serdang Bedagai, Langkat, and Deli Serdang have been selected for assessment against the Standard. From 1,202 farmers in the 3 districts who have participated in the BRIA Farmer Field Schools (FFSs), around 223 farmers have been selected using proportionate stratified random probability sampling to represent the target group. The study was conducted from the end of August to early September 2016 by a local university which is collaborating with BRIA ID in North Sumatra.

From the farmers' survey, the BRIA ID farmers in the North Sumatra scored an average 60-80% against the SRP Standard. It is found that there is room for improvement in most chapters of the Standard, especially for farm management (crop calendar and record keeping), pre-planting, water management, nutrient management, and harvest & post-harvest.

The biggest challenges both relate to record-keeping-how to encourage farmers to update the crop calendar and their farmers' diaries. Both topics have been covered in the BRIA ID training and the FFS, yet a longer process is needed to drive adoption. The Crop Calendar and Record Keeping provide an essential basis for farmers to assess the economic efficiency of their farm operations. With good farm management skills, keeping detailed records of all operations allows farmers to make an accurate projection of their farm business, and helps farmers see the potential benefit of each intervention that they apply on the farm.

The study resulted in three recommendations for driving wider-scale adoption of the standard in Indonesia:

- More capacity building for individual farmers and farmer groups.
- Government support will be essential to achieve a sustainable agricultural system in Indonesia, especially in relation to environmental quality standards, farm management, and also in the improvement of infrastructure.
- The set-up of the Standard could be improved to allow more flexibility to take into account local wisdom at each implementation site.

Moreover, the support from private sector value chain actors and other stakeholders will be essential. With the requirement to use certified seeds and sustainable best practice for nutrient and pest management, the role of input suppliers will be crucial.

The result of this farmers' survey is to be shared with the Indonesian MoA (Ministry of Agriculture), to be considered as a basis to reinforce the development of Indonesia's Good Agricultural Practices standard, as well as to revisit policies towards sustainable farming practices.

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