Contribute to Better Rice Production and Nutrition in South East Asia

Better Rice Initiative Asia - **Monthly Update**

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Editor's Note

Improving Farmers' Livelihoods through Rice Value Chain

BRIA Indonesia is developing and disseminating best practices in rice production to improve farmers' incomes and nutrition. Since climate change can impact rice production and quality, BRIA recently collaborated with the ASEAN Forestry and Climate Change Project (FOR-CC) to organize Training of Trainers (ToT) on 'Using Climate Information for Decision Making in Rice Farming' to promote climate change resilient rice cultivation. The participants included BRIA 'champion' farmers and field facilitators as well as government officials.

The BRIA newsletter also shares with you some current farming practices of farmers deemed to require improvement and training needs expressed by target farmers in Thailand. This issue requires constant scrutiny as BRIA is conducting training of lead farmers in four northeastern provinces. Apart from a baseline survey completed for the project by the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Kasetsart University, BRIA has been regularly given advice by officials from Thai Rice Department (RD) to better address sustainable rice production in this major rice producing country.

BRIA Viet Nam is assessing its Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model launched in three provinces in the Mekong Delta. BRIA is glad to report the preliminary results of this program being implemented in Lap Vo District, Dong Thap Province. BRIA Viet Nam will use the feedback to improve its initiative to improve rice quality, farmers' livelihoods, the capacity of farmer cooperatives and market linkages.

BRIA Philippines is poised to implement a model aimed at facilitating better market linkages. The model seeks to strengthen partnership among rice value chain stakeholders, enhance business and technical capacity of the farmer organization, raise farm productivity and farmers' incomes. The implementation will be led by the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice). Once successfully tested, this model can be replicated by other regions to expand the impact.

Suriyan Vichitlekarn, BRIA Regional Director
Kamol Taukitphaisarn, BRIA Communication

Indonesia

Use of climate information services
to manage climate related risks in rice farming

BRIA in collaboration with the ASEAN Forestry and Climate Change Project (FOR-CC) recently organized Training of Trainers (ToT) on 'Using Climate Information for Decision Making in Rice Farming' at Grand Serela Hotel, Medan, Indonesia. The event aimed to develop an effective approach to support farmers in making better informed decisions about their crop and management options. To do so, a training module to improve farmers' access to climate information as well as capacity to use this information and develop response strategies will be developed based on the training.

The training was attended by BRIA field facilitators, participants from University of North Sumatra (USU), Islamic University of North Sumatra (UISU), College of Agricultural Extension (STPP) Medan, Assessment Institute for Agricultural Technology (BPTP) North Sumatra, Food Crops and Horticulture Plant Protection Service (BPTPH) North Sumatra as well as BRIA 'champion' farmers.

They are expected to use the learning and integrate it into their services provided to farmers and related organizations. Lectures were delivered by key experts on the topic in Indonesia from the Indonesian Agroclimate and Hydrology Research Institute (IAHRI), the Indonesian Center for Rice Research (ICRR), Center for Pest Forecasting (BBPOPT), the Indonesian Agency for Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics (BMKG), University of Indonesia and the Indramayu Rainfall Observers Club. The topics ranged from basic concepts of climatology and climate change to the Integrated Cropping Calendar of the IAHRI, new and improved rice varieties as well as the relationship between climatic factors and pest control.

The training was complemented by a field trip to Suka Makmur Village, Binjai, Langkat, North Sumatra to observe a BMKG rainfall monitoring station and discuss possible uses of climate information. On this occasion, Rhino Ariefiansyah, an anthropologist from University of Indonesia, together with one of Indramayu Rainfall Observers Club members, Nurkillah, demonstrated how the club collects rainfall and agro-ecological information and utilize this to improve farm management decisions.

"This training provided me with insight into how we can, actually, use climate information to be well-prepared for climate change. Nurkillah gave me inspiration on how to manage a rice field. I am happy to have new friends who I can discuss my rice field with. I also learnt a lot about many types of rice varieties," said Suhaimin, a farmer in Langkat, Medan, North Sumatra.

In the future, BRIA will update its training curriculum by taking climate issues into account. Furthermore, BRIA plans to integrate Climate-Friendly Technologies (CFT) for rice within its farm data management system and seek cooperation with BMKG Sumatra Utara with regard to climate information services.

FOR-CC comes under the ASEAN-German Programme on Response to Climate Change in Agriculture and Forestry (GAP-CC) to improve the framework conditions for sustainable agriculture and forestry in ASEAN Member States. The project promotes increased resilience to climate change through the dissemination of climate-smart agricultural practices.

Article contributed by ASEAN Forestry and Climate Change (FOR-CC)/ Photo by Theopilus Sitepu

Thailand

BRIA works with a local university to assess farmers' training needs

BRIA Thailand collaborates with Rice Department, Department of Agricultural Extension, local authorities and Bayer CropScience to conduct farmer training. To understand the constraints, aspirations, needs and training wants of farmers under the project, BRIA has commissioned the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Kasetsart University to conduct a baseline study.

The study interviewed 640 farmers from 29 CRCs (Community Rice Centers) in Sisaket, Surin, Ubon Ratchathani, and Roi Et in the northeastern region and in Suphan Buri and Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in the central region.

According to the results of the evaluation of farmers' knowledge and training requirements, target farmers were found to have the following farming practices that should be improved:

Topic	Areas	Remark
1. Soil testing	Central	There were a low percentage of farmers who did soil tests.
2. Straw burning	Central	There were a relatively high percentage of farmers who burnt straw.
3. Seed selection	Roi Et	A factor for seed selection for a considerable number of farmers was convenience.
4. Use of organic materials	Central	A low percentage of farmers applied organic materials.
5. Chemical fertilizer application	All areas	• Types of fertilizers used by farmers were much more diversified especially in Ubon Ratchathani. • A substantial number of farmers requested training on this topic.
6. Use of personal protective equipment when applying chemicals	• Ubon Ratchathani • Sisaket	Many farmers did not use any protective equipment when applying chemicals.
7. Disposal of empty pesticide containers	All areas	Farmers disposed them in various ways which might not be appropriate.
8. Application of herbicides	• Central • Sisaket	Some farmers used herbicides which were not recommended for rice or used them in the incorrect period.



Topic	Areas	Remark
9. Application of insecticides	• Central • Roi Et	• Some insecticides used by farmers were prohibited from being used in rice production. • Many farmers in the central region could not indicate the insecticides they used as they forgot or the insecticides might be provided by the persons they hired to do the job without the knowledge of the names of the chemicals.
10. Appropriate time to harvest	Central	Only about one third of farmers in the central CRCs harvested rice when three quarters of the rice grains in the panicle turned yellow.
11. Harvest and postharvest	All areas	• The results of the evaluation of farmers' knowledge showed that many farmers in all areas had weak knowledge about this topic. • Very few of household heads were trained on this topic during the past 12 months. • The topic was requested by the highest number of farmers for future training. • The satisfaction level of farmers in the central region regarding the extension services they received with regard to harvesting was relatively low.
12. Soil improvement	All areas	The topic was highly requested for future training particularly in the northeast.

In addition, it was found that private companies had a limited role in providing knowledge to farmers; therefore, it would be helpful if they could enhance their role in advising farmers about appropriate farming practices and use of inputs.

Neighbours were found to be a major source of knowledge especially in the central CRCs; therefore the program for "Training of Trainers" (ToT) in each community is considered to be useful as farmers are likely to learn from the persons in the community they know.

Last but not least, demonstration of the effectiveness of new technology should be enhanced. Most farmers, especially in the central region, were found to prefer to wait until they could find the evidence of successful outcomes before the adoption of new knowledge.

Vietnam

Implementing PPP Model In Dong Thap

In Dong Thap Province, BRIA is cooperating with the Plant Protection Sub-Department and the Agriculture & Aquaculture Extension Center to implement the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model in the large scale rice fields in the 2015 – 2016 winter/spring season in Lap Vo District.

In this model, BRIA seeks to improve farmers' knowledge of and skills in rice farming, effective management of inputs and reduction of production costs to increase their yield and income. BRIA also aims to develop the capacity for farmer cooperatives and promote market linkages.

Overview of the PPP Model

The participating parties in the PPP model include Hoang Long Joint Stock Company, Binh Hiep B farmer cooperative in Binh Thanh Trung Commune, Lap Vo District and other related stakeholders.

The model covers an area of 208 ha, including adjacent fields of 174 households. 174 households were grouped into 17 groups led by farmer group leaders.

In the large fields, farmers used the same high quality rice variety and followed the same cultivation procedure. Hoang Long signed an economic contract with farmers to purchase their paddy.

Cultivation methods applied in the fields were supervised by a technical group composed of 3 staff members from the local Agricultural Extension Center and local Plant Protection Sub-Department. The technical group members worked closely with farmer group leaders to guide farmers in using the field diary to keep track of their farm operations.

Participating farmers were provided with technical training. They cooperated with farmer group leaders to visit the fields and solve emerging issues every week.

Hoang Long Company cooperated with Binh Hiep B farmer cooperative to purchase paddy in the fields from farmers and transport the paddy to its storehouse. The price was 50VND/kg higher than the market price at the trading time.

Hoang Long Company offered advance payment to farmers through the farmer cooperative at the beginning of the season to buy seeds.

Results

All the farmers used the certified Jasmine 85 variety, which was provided by Southern Seed Company and recommended by Hoang Long after checking the seed quality. Hoang Long was committed to buying all the paddy of this variety from the fields.

After the technical training, participating farmers gradually applied trained techniques in their fields. Their knowledge about proper use of fertilizers, pesticides and agricultural inputs, as well as environmental impact reduction was improved.

Large scale and concentrated rice cultivation areas were formed; linkages between famers and rice traders were established with the output sources for farmers ensured.

Overall, the relations among rice traders, farmer cooperatives/groups, famers and local authorities have been strengthened.

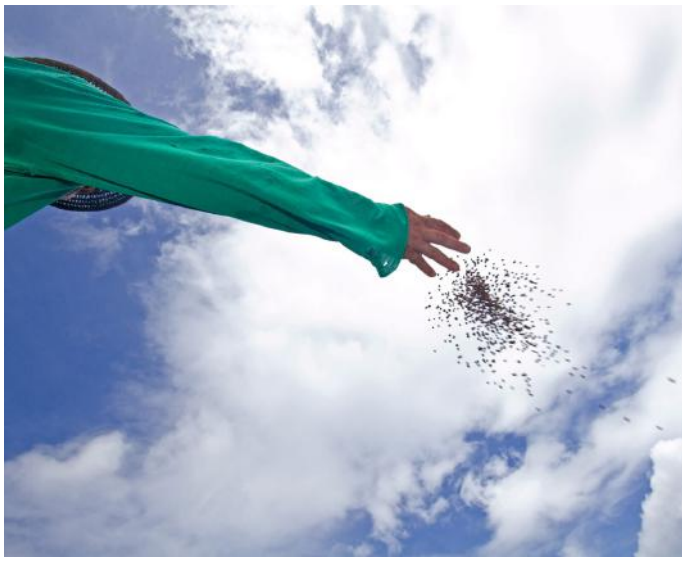
Suggestions for Improvement

- Farmers should clearly understand their rights and obligations when participating in the PPP model.
- Farmers need to participate in the stakeholder meetings and technical training courses regularly for proper adoption of trained techniques.
- Farmers should practice taking notes in the field diary.
- Farmers need to keep their commitment to sell paddy to the rice trader per the agreement.
- The rice trader should identify proper days for harvest and buy paddy from farmers when the rate of ripening reaches 85 – 90%.
- The role in providing agricultural services of Binh Hiep B was improved through the support of line sowing machines. The farmer cooperative should ensure that the sowing service is delivered effectively to all participating farmers.
- The local authorities should strengthen their roles in facilitating market linkages following the implementation of the PPP model in Binh Thanh Trung Commune, Lap Vo District and provide decisions for timely problem solving.
- BRIA can follow a clearer operational plan to facilitate its cooperation with the province in implementing activities for the next season and year.

Article contributed by
Nguyen Hai Ha and Kamol T.

Philippines

BRIA to implement a model
aimed at facilitating better market linkages



BRIA plans to implement an economically sustainable pilot model that promotes market-oriented rice production and efficient market linkages. This model aims to forge partnership among rice value chain stakeholders, raise farm productivity and farmers' incomes, and enhance the business and technical capacity of the farmer organization. The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) will lead the implementation of this model. Farmer organizations will play an important role and significantly benefit from the improved market access and rice value chain.

The implementation of the model follows the following methodologies:

a. Building a network of Rice Value Chain (RVC) stakeholders

No single institution can provide all the required assistance of farmers so that it is very important to build a network of RVC stakeholders who are willing to provide the base of support in assisting the farmer group. The partner institutions may include the following: Local Government Unit (LGU), Barangay Development Council, bank or micro-financing institution, non-government organizations, the academe, local farmer groups, and private sector actors, such as BRIA private partners or other private stakeholders. National government agencies such as PhilRice and the Department of Agriculture or GIZ can serve as intermediary in the development process.

A series of consultation meetings will be organized in order to identify RVC stakeholders including potential partner-traders/millers who believe in the project objective and willing to support it. All agreements pertaining to project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation among stakeholders will be put into writing in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on local level.

b. Selection of farmer organization

A community with an existing farmer organization which has low rice productivity and limited market linkages will be selected for the project. Through secondary data gathering and key informant interviews, the interest and commitment towards achieving organizational goals by the farmer group will be assessed. The social network and sphere of influence of the organization, among other factors, will also be looked into.

c. Capacity Enhancement

The Farmer Field School approach will be used in enhancing the capacity of the farmer organization selected. It will focus on two main aspects: a) use of integrated crop management techniques to improve farm productivity; and b) enterprise development and management to improve market access and linkages, based on a calculated business case.

The members of the partner farmer organization will be encouraged to adopt the best management practices and technologies observed in the learning field in order to raise the level and quality of production in order to meet market demand.

Coaching and mentoring sessions will be designed to enhance a sense of self-confidence among the farmers. This will be conducted using informal discussions and advisory sessions on specific technology and business issues to further encourage and promote the organization's critical consciousness and value judgment, thereby hastening the learning process.

d. Demonstration Farm

A demonstration cum seed production farm measuring about 1.0 ha will be used to demonstrate varieties of good grain quality and high market acceptability. The same varieties should be planted by the participating farmer-members because these were earlier identified to be of high market demand and recommended by partner-trader/miller. In other words, the contract farming scheme will be carried out wherein the trader/miller specifies the quantity, quality, and price required, with the farmers agreeing to deliver at a future date.

For demonstration farm selection, the site must be irrigated and accessible so that more people, especially farmers, will know about the project. The demo farm also serves as the learning field for the Farmer Field School.

Rice varieties and certified seeds preferred by both the farmers and miller will be identified.

The amount of seeds to be used by the farmers will depend on the potential market requirement which will be approved by the miller. PhilRice will source the seeds from accredited seed growers or other providers on the market. Payment will be collected at harvest time to be later turned to the organization as seed capital. The basis for the selection of varieties will be an economically viable business case, considering input costs and expected output.

About two weeks before harvesting, a Field Day and Forum will be organized to showcase the project achievements in terms of enhancing productivity. The activity also aims to keep the partner-trader/miller posted about the project as well as strengthening linkage with them.

The demonstration farm will pilot the implementation of the internationally developed SRP standard (of the Sustainable Rice Platform). The demonstration farm shall therefore serve as a trial to assess the feasibility of the implementation of the SRP standard, for the first time in the Philippines.

e. Market Needs Assessment and Analysis

A market needs assessment and analysis will be conducted to map the market and delineate the value chain, based on the results and experiences of the SLE-study carried out by the Center for Rural Development of the Humboldt University of Berlin. Through this activity, the chain actors who are actually involved in a particular product transaction as it moves through the chain can be identified. Moreover, a needs assessment survey will be conducted to identify the following: a) market or customer needs; b) product or rice quality which is in demand by specific buyers and traders; and c) farmers who are interested in supplying the market needs, taking into account the business case for the involved value chain actors.

f. Monitoring and Evaluation

Farm visits and informal discussions will be done to monitor the situation in the target site. All pertinent data and observation will be gathered and recorded in prescribed monitoring forms. A year-end review and re-planning will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the development strategies used and formulate measures to improve the implementation. The lessons learnt from the activity shall be shared with the other BRIA Project countries.

To facilitate monitoring and evaluation of development interventions, GIS mapping will be done. Through mapping, change over time can be monitored and graphic presentation of conditions and relationships can be easily created.

BRIA believes that after tested and documented, this model for profitable long-term arrangements for smallholder rice farmers can be replicated by other regions.

In Collaboration with National and Regional Agencies and

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Better Rice Initiative Asia
BRIA
Better Rice, Better Life

BRIA Regional Secretariat Office
39/1 Soi Sukhumvit 13, Sukhumvit Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110 Thailand
bria@giz.de
www.better-rice-initiative-asia.org

Responsible for the content:
Suriyan Vichitlekarn (BRIA Regional Director)

If you want to be added or removed from this mailing list, please contact:
kamol.taukitphaisarn@giz.de