Sri Lanka and IRRI

History of partnership

Sri Lanka and IRRI started collaboration in 1960 through exchange of rice varieties and training. In 1967, an agreement between Sri Lanka and the Ford Foundation led to a 2-year program between IRRI and the country's Department of Agriculture (DOASL). Under the program, DOASL scientists underwent training at IRRI. It was renewed in 1969 and included technology transfer activities.

In 1972, the Ford Foundation supported an IRRI project to improve the storage methods and marketing system of the Paddy Marketing Board of Sri Lanka.

USAID, IRRI, and the Sri Lankan government were involved in another project (1978-84) that aimed to address the rice research and development needs of the country, taking into account the country's agro-ecological zones. Sri Lanka's rice research system consequently underwent restructuring.

Eight regional agricultural stations were entrusted to conduct rice research. Training was provided scientists, 15 of whom completed master's degrees and 5, PhDs. About 100 officers were trained for periods ranging from 2 weeks to 4 months on various areas of rice research. This, along with support for infrastructure and facilities, helped upgrade the capability of rice scientists and significantly helped the country reach rice self-sufficiency.

Anuru Abeysekera, a research officer at Sri Lanka's Department of Agriculture (right) and IRRI associate scientist Ofie Namuco look at promising rice varieties with potential to compete against weeds.

Key achievements

- **Better rice varieties**. By 2009, 95% of Sri Lanka's rice land was planted with improved rice varieties, according to the Council for Partnership on Rice Research in Asia or CORRA. Over the last 60 years , annual rice production has reportedly increased by more than tenfold. Within the same period, average rice yields have increased by 0.8 tons per hectare to 4.18 tons per hectare. The high-yielding varieties, along with associated technologies developed by the country's Department of Agriculture, significantly improved rice production.
- **Joint efforts toward rice self-sufficiency.** In the 1950s, Sri Lanka imported an average of 60% of its annual rice needed for 6 million people. Improvements in the genetic potential of rice varieties through breeding; improved management practices and facilities; and support through certified seeds, credit facilities, and a guaranteed-price scheme allowed the country to reach self-sufficiency in 2000. In 2010, Sri Lanka produced about 15–20% more rice than it needed for a population of 20 million and imported only less than 1% (as specialty rice for its hotel industry).
- **Conservation of rice genetic diversity.** The International Rice Genebank holds in trust about 2,027 types of rice from Sri Lanka.
- **Better scientific capacity.** 135 scholars from Sri Lanka completed their studies and 426 trainees attended short courses at IRRI from 1964 to 2014.

In 1999, Sri Lanka held the National Symposium on Rice, which aimed to make policymakers, donor agencies, and the general public more aware of the status, needs, and the consequent development of Sri Lanka's rice sector as well as to attract donor support. The symposium was dedicated to internationally renowned Sri Lankan rice breeder, Dharmawansa Senadhira.

From 2007 to 2009, IRRI and DOASL identified more areas for mutual cooperation: exchange of rice varieties toward better yield as well as quality, enhancing conservation of rice genetic resources, increasing labor productivity, strengthening delivery and impact of technology through good extension models, and others.

As with agreements in the past, DOASL continued to serve as the clearing house for IRRI's activities in Sri Lanka, and both institutions continue to find ways to improve collaboration and funding support. ■

Current collaboration

- **Breeding better rice varieties.** Under 3 projects, IRRI is helping Sri Lanka develop rice varieties such as: Green Super Rice, that can produce stable yields with less inputs; hybrids, which yield more; and those that can withstand the effects of climate change, using genes that allow rice to survive flooded conditions without oxygen during germination. Work is also being done to improve direct seeding—the most common crop establishment method—in Sri Lanka.
- **Use of socioeconomic data toward reducing poverty.** IRRI is tracking the diffusion of rice varieties across South Asia and aims to generate widely accessible databases on crop improvement. This will allow better understanding of the impact of food-crop genetics research on making food more available for the poor and food-insecure in the region.
- **Fine-tuning rice farming systems.** The Closing Rice Yield Gaps With Reduced Environmental Footprint (CORIGAP) project is one of several projects by IRRI that aim to raise the productivity, profitability, and resilience of rice farming systems while ensuring environmental sustainability. IRRI will develop innovation platforms that foster participatory research and extension through CORIGAP. Key partners of the project include policy advisers; farmers and farmer groups; teaching institutions; and agricultural practitioners from NGOs, the private sector, and government research and extension agencies.
- **Coping with climate change.** Headquartered in Sri Lanka, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is working with IRRI on initiatives under the Climate Change affecting Land Use in the Mekong Delta: Adaptation of Rice-based Cropping Systems (CLUES) project.

International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)

IRRI is the world's premier research organization dedicated to reducing poverty and hunger through rice science; improving the health and welfare of rice farmers and consumers; and protecting the rice-growing environment for future generations. Headquartered in the Philippines and with offices in 17 countries, IRRI is a global, independent, nonprofit research and training institute supported by public and private donors.

IRRI breeds and introduces advanced rice varieties that yield more grain and better withstand pests and disease as well as flooding, drought, and other harmful effects of climate change. The Institute develops new and improved methods and technologies that enable farmers to manage their farms profitably and sustainably. IRRI recommends rice varieties and agricultural practices suitable to particular farm conditions and consumer preferences. Finally, IRRI assists national agricultural research and extension systems (NARES) in formulating and implementing national rice sector strategies and programs.

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