

Rice-Wheat Information Sheet

No.6

Welcome again

It is a month since the last RWIS, the period recommended by the Regional Technical Coordination Committee (RTCC) at their recent Meeting. This has been a very busy interval because of that Meeting, and the start of preparations for the Regional Steering Committee Meeting.

National Workshop Bangladesh

This meeting was held 15-16 Nov at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Dhaka, to review the research work on R-W systems in Bangladesh, and to develop a proposal to submit to the RTCC. The Executive Vice Chairman of BARC, Dr M S U Chowdhury chaired the Opening Session. Also participating in that Session were the Chief Guest, Dr M Badruddoza, the DGs of BARI, BRRI, and Extension, the Chairman of BADC, and the Director of Wheat Research. This level of participants indicated the great importance given to the R-W Initiative in Bangladesh. There were 15 papers presented in three technical sessions. The papers dealt with the importance of the R-W system, productivity trends, variety development, grower-defined research, soil fertility, research achievements in the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-funded R-W Initiative, water management, resource management, and policy. The final session considered the 5-year plan/proposal to be submitted to the RTCC Meeting in Katmandu.

Regional Technical Coordination Committee Meeting

Twenty participants met at Hotel de l' Annapurna, Kathmandu, Nepal, 22-24 Nov. The Committee Members from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, CIMMYT, IRRI, ICRISAT, and the Interim Facilitator were present. Unfortunately the R-W Convener from Pakistan was unable to get government clearance at the last minute. Also participating were resource persons and observers from Bangladesh (1), India (1), Nepal (3), China (1), CIMMYT (2), ICRISAT (2), IMMI (1), IBSRAM (1), and Cornell University, USA (1)

The Chairman Dr S L Shrestha, R-W Convener of Nepal welcomed the participants to the host country. The Interim Facilitator emphasized that this Initiative is a new phase of the R-W Consortium that has been working on the sustainability of R-W Based Cropping Systems for the past 4 years with ADB support. Thus, there is already a good research structure in place in the Region. The new phase will build on the existing program with emphasis given to increased planning input by National Programs.

The National R-W Conveners from Bangladesh (one each for wheat and rice), India, and Nepal each presented an in-depth country report based on the output from their National R-W Workshops (see this and earlier RWIS for these reports). Professor Guo Yixian from China gave a very useful report on R-W activities in China, despite his invitation arriving too late for him to prepare a formal paper. There was discussion of each presentation. A representative from each of the international organizations supplied a short statement on potential contributions of their institutions to the Initiative. They met later as a group and refined their possible contributions on the basis of the discussions during the Meeting. Consideration was also given to the possible roles the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Centro Internacional de la Papa (CIP), and local missions of the World Bank and USAID might play.

Detailed consideration by the Meeting of the problems and research requirements of R-W systems in Asia was prefaced by a series of discussions on:

- The meaning of sustainability (the working definition we use that "Rice-Wheat systems are sustainable if the rate of production increase is greater than the rate of population increase" may be too simple, and leaves many aspects unconsidered, it will need further consideration by a special group).
- The objectives and expected outputs from the meeting (identify unifying issues and links across the region, standardize data collection to allow meaningful comparisons, indicate financial requirements, develop a system to monitor progress and impact)

- A problem-solving process (to provide a framework to define problems, identify prototype solutions, adapt and accelerate adoption of solutions, and measure impact).

Participants broke into four groups to apply this problem-solving process to four of the issues in R-W systems: crop establishment, soil fertility, water management, and ecological consequences. The issues of productivity and alternate policy options were considered to be embedded in the other four issues. With this background, national scientists met as a group to identify and prioritize the issues to be considered under the Initiative. The R-W issues with top priority were divided into three major areas:

- Soil fertility (nutrient dynamics and simulation modeling, organic matter maintenance, upgrading soil testing, and micronutrients).
- Water management (efficient drainage, water-use efficiency, and indicators of productivity).
- Integrated pest management (increase knowledge at the systems level of interactions between pests and IPM interventions so as to provide pest control with minimum pesticide use).

It was felt that the output of this Meeting would form three or four well-designed inter linked projects. Writing these projects should be done by separate groups meeting within the region. In these projects the links among research groups including those in China should be clearly laid out. It was felt that a detailed background statement should be developed to be used as a preface for each project submission. This preface might be written with the first project, perhaps starting with the IPM or micro nutrient projects. All projects should be completed in 3 months. Funds for these projects should compliment existing bilateral funding. These write-ups will be done as a matter of urgency once the ideas are cleared by the RSC in January. There was enthusiastic high-caliber participation by those attending the Meeting. It was a disappointment not to have Pakistan's input. The Chinese participation added an important dimension, and the Nepalese were excellent hosts.

Next RTCC Meeting

Professor Guo a generously offered to host the next RTCC meeting in Nanjing, China at the end of Oct 1995. Dr. Nagarajan volunteered to provide a fallback location at the Directorate of Wheat Research (DWR), Karnal, India in the period Jul-Sep 1995.

Name for the Initiative

Possible shortened names which would form an easy-to-remember acronym were considered. One suggestion was South Asian Rice-Wheat Research Consortium (SARWRC) which comes close in sound to STAR WARS. It was felt that the name should contain at least the words 'Asian', 'Rice-Wheat', and 'Consortium' with possibly 'Sustainable'. The Facilitator would be glad to receive suggestions immediately from readers of the RWIS. Please send them to him now.

Facilitator

Thirty-five applications have been received for the position, they include many highly qualified persons. The RSC will interview candidates from a short list at their Meeting in Jan 1995.

Funding

Interim funding has been provided to ICRISAT by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the CGIAR to support the activities of the Facilitation Unit (FU). An application to TAC is being prepared, seeking a continuation of such funding. Funds have already been promised by members of the Donor Support Group to support the activities of the Initiative. It is imperative that the project documents be prepared quickly so that these funds can be made available as soon as possible.

Communication

Easy rapid communication among Initiative members continues to be a problem. The FU at ICRISAT New Delhi can continue to be the node for communication among the countries using e-mail, fax, and telex. The FU is being greatly assisted by the CIMMYT offices in Nepal and Bangladesh. A continuing problem is the lack of rapid communication within most countries of the Initiative. Ways to overcome these problems will be a continuing concern of the FU.

CIMMYT Regional Activities

CIMMYT is arranging an exchange of R-W scientists between eastern India and Nepal, and is planning roving seminars in Nepal and Bangladesh during the wheat season.

Regional Steering Committee (RSC) Meeting

Notices have been issued to the members of the RSC for their next meeting, 23-24 Jan 1995, which will be held hosted by International Irrigation Management Institute (IMMI) in Colombo, Sri Lanka hosted by IIMI. The plan to hold the meeting in Bangladesh had regretfully to be changed at the suggestion of the Dr M S U Chowdhury in view of the unsettled political situation in that country. He was very disappointed as his group had been most anxious to have the meeting held in Bangladesh. The next R-W Information Sheet will be early in the New Year.