

**ACHIEVING BORO RICE PRODUCTION TARGETS IN FY2009-10**

***Challenges and Actions Required***

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**Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)**

House 40/C, Road 11 (New), Dhanmondi R/A

Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh

Telephone: (8802) 8124770, 9141703, 9141734, 9145090

Fax: (8802) 8130951

E-mail: [info@cpd.org.bd](mailto:info@cpd.org.bd)

Website: [www.cpd.org.bd](http://www.cpd.org.bd)

<http://www.cpd.org.bd/Blog/>

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), established in 1993, is a civil society initiative to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. Over the past years, CPD has organised a series of such dialogues at local, regional and national levels. CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as international dialogues to pursue for the LDC interests in various fora including WTO, UN and other multilateral organisations. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition frontbenchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in the civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. CPD seeks to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well-being of the country.

In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of the CPD include *Macroeconomic Performance Analysis; Poverty, Inequality and Social Justice; Agriculture and Rural Development; Trade, Regional Cooperation and Global Integration; Investment Promotion, Infrastructure and Enterprise Development; Climate Change and Environment; Human Development and Social Protection; and Development Governance, Policies and Institutions*. CPD also conducts periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and issues of developmental concerns. With a view to promote vision and policy awareness amongst the young people of the country, CPD is also implementing a *Youth Leadership Programme*.

Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. Pursuant to this CPD maintains an active publication programme, both in Bangla and in English. As part of CPD's publication activities, a **CPD Dialogue Report Series** is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre.

The present report contains the highlights of the dialogue on ***Achieving Boro Rice Production Targets in FY2009-10: Challenges and Actions Required*** held on 23 December 2009 at the CIRDAAP Auditorium, Dhaka.

**Prepared by:** *Muhammad Al Amin*, Senior Research Associate, CPD.

**Assistant Editor:** *Anisatul Fatema Yousuf*, Director, Dialogue & Communication, CPD.

**Series Editor:** *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Chairman, CPD.



## **THE DIALOGUE**

The dialogue on *Achieving Boro Rice Production Targets in FY2009-10: Challenges and Actions Required*, organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), was held on 23 December 2009 at the CIRDAP Auditorium, Dhaka. The main objective of this dialogue was to share the findings of a study carried out by CPD on the above mentioned subject, keeping in view the upcoming Boro season, present the policy suggestions generated from the analysis, and hold a discussion with the relevant stakeholders.

*Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Chairman, CPD presided over the session while *Dr Uttam Deb*, Head of Research, CPD presented the keynote paper. *Begum Matia Chowdhury, MP*, Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture attended the meeting as the Chief Guest; and *Mr Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir*, Former State Minister for the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) was present as the Special Guest.

The dialogue was participated by academia, senior government officials and policymakers, experts on agriculture, researchers of various government and non-government organisations (NGOs), representatives of development agencies, journalists, political leaders and representatives from farmers' association. The list of participants is attached at the end of the report.

## **THE KEYNOTE PAPER**

*Dr Uttam Deb*, in his presentation, covered the following five broad areas: i) recent developments in global and domestic food situation; ii) reality check for Boro production target in FY2009-10; iii) input delivery strategy to ensure higher Boro production; iv) procurement strategy; and v) policy implications.

*Dr Deb* initiated his presentation by describing the recent structural changes that have taken place in rice production in Bangladesh. He stated that dependence for food security has been shifted from Aman to Boro rice which is now about half of the total rice production in Bangladesh. This structural change in rice production and more dependence on Boro season has made rice production a function of input supply, prices and policies rather than vagaries of nature, he added.

### **Recent Developments in Global and Domestic Food Situation**

While clarifying the recent developments in global and domestic food situation, *Dr Deb* cited some facts and figures published recently in various reports, journals, and newspapers. He mentioned that according to the USDA Rice Outlook (11 December 2009), global rice production in 2009-10 will decline by 3 per cent and production will be 433.9 million metric tonnes (MT). Adding example from India, he said that the production of Kharif rice in India will be 69.45 million MT in 2009-10 against 84.58 million MT in 2008-09 (18 per cent decline) as per the estimation by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation of India.

*Dr Deb* sketched recent movement of the key rice traders around the globe to explain the rice market situation in international arena. He stated that the rice import demand would

rise in the coming year as major importers such as India, Philippines and Brazil have already declared to import more. *Dr Deb* expressed his concern that if there is any production shortfall in Bangladesh, then it might be difficult to import from the international market.

While explaining the international rice price situation, *Dr Deb* made a comparison of rice prices among Bangladesh, India and Thailand which revealed that since July 2006 rice price in Bangladesh was lower than that of Thailand and India with a few exceptions. In this backdrop, *Dr Deb* opined that even if Bangladesh needs to import from the international market, it would be at a higher cost than current domestic price. Feeding her own population at a lower cost would only be possible by attaining self-sufficiency in rice production, he added.

*Dr Deb* then described the domestic food situation, and focused on domestic production. He highlighted that in FY2008-09, total production of foodgrains (rice and wheat) was 32.2 million MT, which is the highest production in Bangladesh's history. He mentioned, it was due to good harvest of rice (Aus, Aman and Boro) and wheat in all seasons. Government's decision to reduce price of non-urea fertiliser and smooth supply of electricity to irrigation pumps along with expectation of good profit by the farmers also contributed to high level of production in FY2008-09. However, *Dr Deb* pointed out that the low price of paddy at the farm-level during May-July had a negative toll on the production of Aus rice and probably also on Aman rice in FY2009-10. He informed that planting of Aman was delayed and it was affected by lower rainfalls and early droughts. Therefore, he apprehended a lower Aman production in the current season.

The presenter informed the audience that price of rice is an important determinant of food inflation in Bangladesh which contributes 42 per cent share of the total food inflation, and the recent rise in the domestic prices is actually already reflected in the food inflation curve. It also affects the food import situation of the country. In this context, *Dr Deb* mentioned that during 1 July-15 December, 2009 no commercial import of rice by public and private sector had taken place in Bangladesh due to lower domestic price.

### **Reality Check for Boro Production Target in FY2009-10**

*Dr Deb* attempted to check the rationality of Boro production target set by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in FY2009-10. He reported that the MoA set a target of cultivating Boro rice in 48 lakh hectares (ha) of land in FY2009-10. He added that the target for Boro area in FY2009-10 is 1.8 per cent higher than actual Boro area in FY2008-09, and the target for Boro production is 6.7 per cent (19 million tonnes) higher than actual production in FY2008-09. To examine the reality of this target, *Dr Deb* presented historical evidence of Boro rice targets and achievements. He informed that during FY1980-81 to FY2008-09, the area under Boro rice cultivation increased from 1.16 million ha to 4.72 million ha, while the production of Boro rice increased from 2.63 million tonnes to 17.8 million tonnes and per hectare yield of Boro increased from 2.27 ton/ha to 3.78 ton/ha. He also mentioned that during this period, annual compound rate of growth in area, production and yield of Boro rice was 4.75, 6.48 and 1.73 per cent respectively.

### **Input Delivery Strategy to Ensure Higher Boro Production**

*Dr Deb* presented the current input delivery situation of Boro production and suggested a number of strategies which would be required to ensure a good Boro harvest in FY2009-10. While emphasising the importance of good quality Boro seeds, he cited Hossain *et al.* (2002) who have shown that Bangladesh can increase her rice production to the tune of 2 million MT by only supplying quality seeds of the same varieties to the farmers. He mentioned that several modern rice varieties are now available for cultivation in the Boro season in Bangladesh. BRR1 Dhan 47 has been developed for cultivation in the salinity-affected southern-coastal region which would be helpful to expand Boro production area in southern part of Bangladesh, he added. *Dr Deb* appreciated the government initiative to reduce non-urea fertiliser price in November 2009, and he discussed the major features of the new fertiliser dealers' appointment and distribution policy. He finally stressed on the proper irrigation supply, and discussed in detail the information as regards availability of the irrigation resources for the current Boro season in Bangladesh.

### **Procurement Strategy**

According to *Dr Deb*, due to lower price of Boro immediately after the harvest in the last season, farmers may have some reluctance in Boro cultivation in current season. He commented that even though government has already made some efforts through reduction in non-urea fertiliser prices, expansion of agricultural credit and announcement of subsidy for diesel for irrigation, an effective Boro procurement strategy may also be used to ensure higher Boro production in the current season. In designing this strategy, the presenter suggested the government to consider some issues which are: (i) cost of Boro production; (ii) adequate incentives for Boro rice growers; (iii) market price at the time of price fixation; (iv) consumers' interest as regards affordable price for rice; and (v) increased public stock of rice. *Dr Deb* suggested that the government should declare procurement price of Boro rice immediately in order to provide adequate incentive to the farmers for production of Boro rice. Considering the likely average cost of production of Boro paddy (Tk. 11.88 per kg) and Boro rice (Tk. 18.84 per kg), he proposed procurement price for Boro paddy to be Tk. 15 per kg and Boro rice to be Tk. 25 per kg.

### **Policy Implications**

*Dr Uttam Deb* appreciated various pragmatic steps taken by the government to achieve targeted Boro production in the current season. He suggested some additional measures which would be helpful in attaining the objective. He stressed the need to address immediately the issue of seed unavailability in some areas that were reported recently in various newspapers. He appreciated the speedy implementation of seed projects under the Annual Development Programme (ADP) of FY2009-10. To ensure sufficient irrigation for current Boro season, *Dr Deb* emphasised on supply of 1,664 MW electricity that was declared by the government earlier. In addition, he urged the government to disburse the declared diesel subsidy of Tk. 350 crore in a timely manner to expedite implementation of irrigation projects under ADP of FY2009-10 to regularly monitor the fertiliser distribution so as to stop distribution of adulterated fertiliser which had been the case in some areas.

*Dr Deb* put forward following suggestions as regards the procurement strategy: (i) declare procurement price immediately to influence farmers' decision and actions; (ii) procure from the small rice millers who have limited processing and storage capacity so that they are forced to supply immediately and buy more rice from the farmers; (iii) encourage farmers to set up rice mills by forming cooperatives; (iv) encourage establishment of grain storage facilities at the union level through public-private partnership (PPP); (v) top priority districts for Boro procurement should be: Dinajpur, Bogra, Thakurgaon, Naogaon, Rangpur and Joypurhat ; (vi) priority districts for Boro procurement should be: Kurigram, Gaibandha, Sherpur, Natore, Pabna, Mymensingh, Jamalpur and Netrokona.

The speaker also recommended to strengthen the role of telecommunication and media since it can play an important role in disseminating information on efficient use of seeds and fertilisers, procedure of irrigation (AWD), and preventing diseases. He stressed on ensuring protection against smuggling of agricultural inputs, especially fertiliser and diesel to neighbouring countries. He has also proposed to review the newly introduced agricultural credit programme for tenant farmers which will be helpful for its expansion. Finally, he suggested to strengthen the weather forecasting system.

## **FLOOR DISCUSSION**

### **Arranging Dialogue before the Season Begins**

*Mr Anwar Faruque*, Director General (Seed Wing), MoA informed that a number of decisions as regards Boro cultivation in current season have already been taken by the government and are now being implemented. He gave an example that the seed distribution of current season is almost over when CPD is launching this dialogue. He observed that it would, therefore, be difficult to implement seed-related suggestions put forward here in the current season. Therefore, he recommended to organise this dialogue at least three months prior to the season starts so that the policies suggested by CPD could be more useful.

*Dr Z Karim*, Chairman, Centre for Agri-Research and Sustainable Environment and Entrepreneurship Development (CASEED) supported what Mr Faruque said, and he proposed to arrange this dialogue in early November so that the policy recommendations excerpted here could be reflected properly in the implementation procedures.

### **Feasibility of Achieving the Boro Production Target**

*Dr Zainul Abedin*, IRRI Representative for Bangladesh, proposed that instead of area expansion, priority should be given to higher productivity through technology transfer to the farmers and training them as area expansion reduces the area available for other crops. According to him, rising efficiency and better management will be helpful to reduce yield gap. *Dr A M Muazzam Hussain*, Former Chairman, Department of Economics and Social Sciences, BRAC University supported Dr Abedin on this issue. To raise productivity he recommended intensification of the efficient use of inputs, escalation of alternate irrigation system and increased use of compost fertiliser.

*Dr Md Abdur Razzaque*, Former Executive Chairman, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) stressed on reduction of production cost through mechanisation. He, however, pointed out that a number of farmers do not use modern equipments in rice cultivation. Those who are using modern equipments are not properly maintaining their equipments which make these tools unusable after a certain period. He opined that in order to reduce production cost through mechanisation, proper maintenance of these machineries is essential.

*Mr Syed Ali*, Director General, Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) agreed with the discussants as regards the necessity of raising productivity. He informed the audience that the government has taken several initiatives to enhance agricultural productivity. He stated that the 48 lakh ha area target for current Boro season is quite reasonable though some of the participants felt that the target was on the higher side.

*Dr Z Karim* of CASEED appreciated the area expansion initiative in southern region of Bangladesh. According to him, availability of diesel and seed on time will be required to ensure good harvest in this region. However, he proposed early harvest practice and experimenting new variety of seeds for these areas.

#### **Availability of Good Quality Boro Seeds**

*Mr Anwar Faruque* assured the audience that the seed situation is comfortable in the current season. He explained that the government has supplied sufficient seeds in the market through BADC. Private sectors also have adequate seeds in their stock to meet the demand. He disagreed with the reports published in various newspapers recently about seed shortage. *Mr Faruque*, however, agreed that some problems remained even after increased seed supply. He mentioned about too much dependency on a single variety, e.g. BRRI 28, which is one of the major reasons of these problems. He suggested to diversify the use of seeds and reduce dependency on a single variety.

*Mr Abdul Mannan, MP*, Bogra 1 Constituency and Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on MoA disagreed with *Mr Faruque* regarding smooth seed distribution in current season, and claimed that there were huge problems in seed distribution. He drew a field-level evidence from his constituency where a Tk. 220 worth of seed bag was sold at Tk. 650.

*Mr Akram Hossain Chowdhury, MP*, Naogaon 3 Constituency supported *Mr Abdul Mannan*, and mentioned that the farmers of his constituency also faced seed shortage problems in the current season. According to him, this problem can be resolved by encouraging farmers to produce seed bed at local level through farmers' cooperatives.

*Mr Anwar Faruque* highlighted that in the last few years price difference between high-yielding variety (HYV) and hybrid varieties was Tk. 30; but in the last season, it has become Tk. 100 per maund. This difference has increased the demand for HYV seeds and reduced demand for hybrid. He informed the audience that 70 per cent hybrid seed is still unsold this season. To solve this problem he suggested to set the same procurement price for hybrid and HYV rice. *Mr Mannan*, however, disagreed with him and urged that it is not the

lower price but lower productivity of hybrid rice which had made farmers less interested in hybrid production.

According to *Mr Syed Ali*, short duration variety is comparatively less productive. Therefore, the cultivation of long duration variety should be encouraged. He proposed to strengthen activities in enhancing the production of BRR1 29 and hybrid rice.

### **Ensuring Electricity Supply for Irrigation**

*Mr Anwar Faruque* informed the audience that the government has taken proper initiatives to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply for irrigation in the upcoming season. For this purpose, city shops will be closed down after 8 pm as it was done in last two seasons, he added. *Mr Faruque* also informed that during this season the government is also planning to close down local and village shops run by Pally Bidyut Samiti after evening.

*Mr Akram Hossain Chowdhury, MP* explained that drought has caused the depletion of underground water level, and there was less surface water available in his region. However, farmers of his constituency faced electricity problem required for intensive irrigation in the last Boro season. In addition, frequent transformer blast hindered uninterrupted electricity supply in his area. To end this problem, they communicated with the high level authority who then decided to close down a local fertiliser factory in order to divert the gas allocation to increase the production of electricity. *Mr Chowdhury* also mentioned that due to unavailability of shallow tube-wells in the market, irrigation procedure was hampered in his constituency.

According to *Mr Chowdhury*, electricity distribution system of the Rural Electrification Board (REB) has several limitations of which inefficiency in distribution mechanism, lack of coordination and deficient management system are the most important ones. To overcome these limitations he proposed to enhance fieldwork by REB, and arrange phase by phase electricity distribution practices.

### **Prudent Use of Scarce Water Resources**

*Dr Md Abdur Razzaque* stressed on balanced water resource uses for irrigation. “We should prudently use our depleting underground and surface water as dependency on single source may worsen the situation in future,” he said. *Dr Z Karim* supported him and alerted the people to be cautious in shallow water use.

*Dr Mahabub Hossain*, Executive Director, BRAC mentioned that due to lesser amount of rainfall in the current season, recharge rate might shrink which may consequently reduce the availability of surface water from tube-wells in the coming Boro season. Therefore, government should be prepared to face a probable water supply crisis for irrigation.

### **Diesel Subsidy for Irrigation**

*Mr Anwar Faruque* disagreed with *Dr Uttam Deb* who suggested to disburse diesel subsidy prior to the beginning of the season. He argued that it would be tough as the farmers do not always know well ahead of time the amount of land that they would cultivate in the

upcoming season. *Mr Abdul Mannan, MP* opposed Mr Faruque's argument and stated that field and extension workers have detailed information about farmers and their possible cultivable land. Therefore, government can distribute diesel subsidy prior to the season by collecting data from extension workers. In response to Mr Mannan, *Dr Dil Afroz Hoque*, Member Director (Fertilizer Management), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) assured that the subsidy would be distributed before the third stage of irrigation, i.e. in January-February of the current season. *Dr Mahabub Hossain* proposed to reduce diesel price for two months during Boro season.

### **Fertiliser Supply Situation and Distribution System**

In response to Dr Uttam Deb's request to the concerned officials present at the dialogue to identify the reason for lower fertiliser use in the last season, *Mr Syed Ali* informed that in FY2008-09 non-urea fertiliser use was lower because of its higher price and lower application for vegetables production. Increased use of Guti urea was also another reason for lower fertiliser use in the last season, he added. However, he emphasised on higher Guti urea use, and requested the researchers to conduct a study which would measure the impact of Guti urea use on crop productivity and its implications on reducing dependency on traditional fertilisers. *Dr Mahabub Hossain* appreciated the rising tendency of Guti urea use and commented that it is a positive sign for Bangladesh agriculture. In addition, he suggested to inspire farmers to use compost fertiliser.

*Dr Z Karim* stressed on applying balanced dose of non-urea fertilisers in agricultural production. According to him, imbalanced use may harm the quality of land in future. He also mentioned that as the current fertiliser prices in international market are comparatively lower, government should buy more now and stock them for the coming season.

*Dr Mahabub Hossain* requested the authority to deliver fertiliser at farmers' level immediately. He mentioned that last season fertiliser use was lower due to higher price and less availability at the beginning of the season.

### **Subsidy Distribution Mechanism and Farmers' Card**

*Mr Murshed Ali*, President, Bangladesh Krishak Samity welcomed the government decision to distribute farmers' card which will contain detailed personal information of the farmers along with their requirement of inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, agricultural credit and irrigation subsidy. He suggested to include farmers' representatives in distributing these cards.

### **Reviewing and Revisiting Boro Procurement Price**

*Mr Abdul Mannan, MP* proposed the government to declare procurement price at the beginning of the season. He also proposed to keep the option of revisiting and reviewing the price later so that government can intervene market whenever necessary. He noted that the current market price of Boro paddy is Tk. 600, whereas procurement price is Tk. 560 which would discourage the farmers to sell their product to the government. The proposal for readjusting procurement price was also supported by Dr Md Abdur Razzaque.

*Dr Zainul Abedin* supported the proposal of Mr Abdul Mannan of declaring procurement price earlier in the season. He argued that prior knowledge of price will inspire the farmers to work harder to get higher production. In addition, it will help them decide whether they will go for intensive Boro production or substitute it by other crops.

*Dr Debi Naryan Rudra Paul*, Professor, School of Business, Uttara University disagreed with the idea of raising the procurement price later, as it can make hard for the consumers to get rice at affordable price. Instead, he proposed to reduce production cost through raising technical efficiency, ensuring better management of input delivery system, and reducing bureaucratic complicity. In response to the comments made by Dr Paul, *Dr Dil Afroz Hoque* argued that reduction of procurement price will cause smuggling of rice to the neighbouring countries where price is comparatively higher.

### **Enhancing Boro Procurement Capacity and Innovative Alternate Storage System**

*Mr Abdul Mannan*, MP suggested the government to strengthen its procurement capacity by taking short, medium and long-run initiatives. He opined that in the short-run, government may collaborate with big farmers and use their excess storage capacity. Government may buy from the surplus producers on condition that they will not sell these paddies until the end of the season. *Dr Zainul Abedin* supported him and stated that in the short-run, government should find ways to mitigate storage capacity problems. *Dr Abedin* also proposed to exercise PPP initiative in enhancing storage capacity which was supported by *Dr Md Abdur Razzaque*. The discussant eventually stressed on strengthening miller-farmer relationship to enhance the procurement capacity. *Mr Murshed Ali* suggested to procure rice directly from the farmers. He also suggested to establish procurement centres at village level.

### **Turmoil in International Rice Market: Concern for Bangladesh**

*Dr Mahabub Hossain* observed that Bangladeshi rice market is seriously influenced by international events. He noted that international rice market is vulnerable to nature; it also fluctuates heavily if any big player buys a large amount in a certain year. He thought that India might have to face a loss of about 15 lakh tonnes of rice this year which may push them to import from international market. Philippines has already started to buy rice from international market and declared to buy more in coming months, he added.

In this backdrop, *Dr Hossain* suggested the Food and Commerce Ministries to take proper initiatives in tackling any jeopardy that may arise in the domestic rice market. He is in favour of raising rice price. He argued that if price is not raised, farmers will be disappointed and may restrain from intensive production which would force us to buy from international market where prices are going to be higher in the coming months. He feared that rice price may get to Tk. 50 per kg for the consumers if necessary steps are not taken immediately. *Dr Mahabub Hossain* also suggested the Food Minister to buy more wheat now because price of this commodity at international market is low at the moment, which may not remain so. He requested the journalists to refrain from spreading panic among people as regards price hike of rice in international market, which may help the local speculators to take advantage of the situation.

*Dr Mahabub Hossain* highlighted that in the last three/four years global rice production has increased by about 5 million MT. Bangladesh is also experiencing an upward trend in rice production. At present, demand for rice in Bangladesh is about 27 million MT. If Bangladesh can manage to produce 30 million MT this year (she expected 18 million MT from the coming Boro season), it will be possible to face any challenge.

### **Strengthening Farmers' Cooperative Associations**

*Mr Akram Hossain Chowdhury, MP* illustrated the necessity of farmers' cooperatives in facing various pre and post-harvest difficulties. According to him, our farmers are disorganised which pushed them to get unfair treatment in accessing input market, and deprived them from getting fair price after harvest. He explained that the millers collude to force farmers in selling their product at below market price. He proposed to strengthen cooperative activities among farmers so that they can pursue their rights and engage in various activities collectively to solve their problems. He excerpted an example of from India where a farmers' cooperative managed to establish a fertiliser company.

### **Use of Alternate Technology to Accelerate Yield Rate**

*Dr A M Muazzam Hossain* advocated for rapid expansion of SRI (System of Rice Intensification) which is now being practiced by big rice growing nations including India. He mentioned that the farmers of Agartala have increased productivity by practicing this technique. He suggested to introduce this system in every suitable region of Bangladesh as soon as possible. According to him, it will reduce usage of other inputs drastically and eventually will reduce production cost. *Dr Zainul Abedin* supported *Dr Muazzam Hossain* and recommended to expand this system throughout Bangladesh.

In this context, *Mr Syed Ali* informed that the SRI system has already been implemented in various districts of Bangladesh including Begamganj and Noakhali. However, because of differences in agro-ecological characteristics, this system could not be introduced everywhere in Bangladesh. He confirmed that the government has planned to expand the practice in every suitable area in the country.

### **Other Policy Concerns**

*Mr Akram Hossain Chowdhury, MP* proposed to reduce risk in agricultural production through introducing crop insurance system in Bangladesh. He also proposed to establish a commodity exchange market as soon as possible which would be helpful to reduce price fluctuation, manipulation, and it will bring stability in the commodity market.

*Dr Mahabub Hossain* proposed to reschedule the Boro season and fix it in *Baisakh* and *Jaistha* months when ground water is more available. *Dr Karim* supported him and added that it would reduce electricity use for irrigation as well.

*Dr Md Abdur Razzaque* reminded the risk of pest attack in the coming season. He mentioned that last season some northern districts were attacked by pests. He suggested the government to take adequate preparation to fight against pests in the coming season. He

also proposed to strengthen early weather forecasting mechanism so that the farmers can prepare themselves against natural catastrophes.

*Mr Murshed Ali* proposed to allocate ration for marginal farmers and day labourers. *Dr Z Karim* focused on tight border protection. According to him, any kind of relaxation in border security may help in smuggling inputs to neighbouring countries.

## COMMENTS FROM THE SPECIAL GUEST

*Mr Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir*, Former State Minister for the Ministry of Agriculture, started his speech by thanking CPD for inviting him to this 'galaxy of intellectuals.' He also thanked the Agriculture Minister for her leadership role, the agricultural scientists for their contribution through various innovations, and the farmers of Bangladesh for ensuring food security through higher production.

*Mr Alamgir* stated that ensuring food security is one of the most important challenges of our country. He observed that the farmers of Bangladesh already started to switch from agriculture to other professions since agriculture has now become a less profitable venture. The farmers who are engaged in agriculture are less interested in rice production as it brings lower profit compared to other crops like potato. To prevent this, he suggested to increase subsidy in agricultural sector, especially for rice production.

*Mr Alamgir* focused on the following three important issues: a) seed supply; b) agricultural credit; and c) decreasing tendency of land availability for agriculture due to increasing population pressure. He alleged that private sector seed suppliers for often selling sub-standard hybrid seeds. The farmers of his constituency faced this type of problem during the last season. Imported hybrid seeds sometimes contain risk of contamination. To solve these problems, *Mr Alamgir* suggested to increase local seed production, enhance seed supply through public sector by improving the capacity of BADC, and strengthen research in domestic rice research institutions. He advised the farmers to be cautious about the quality of hybrid seeds supplied by the private sector.

Appreciating higher allocation for agricultural credit, *Mr Alamgir* welcomed government's efforts to disburse this amount. However, he alleged that these credits are not reaching to the farmers due to corruption and bribery. He presented evidence that in getting Tk. 5,000 worth of credit, farmers often have to offer bribe of Tk. 2,000. He stressed the need for a fairer and transparent credit disbursement mechanism. He also suggested to reduce the interest rate against agricultural credit.

*Mr Alamgir* apprehended that the agro-land is decreasing over time. He informed that about 22,000 ha of land were shifted from agriculture each year due to rapid urbanisation and population growth. He urged to introduce cluster village. *Mr Alamgir* concluded his speech by thanking Dr Uttam Deb for a very comprehensive presentation.

## **RESPONSE FROM THE CHIEF GUEST**

Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture *Begum Matia Chowdhury* initiated her speech by thanking CPD for arranging this gathering with the key people who are directly involved in agriculture including officers from the ministries, economists, extension workers, journalists, Former State Minister of Agriculture, and other learned people who are thinking about the prosperity of Bangladesh's agriculture. She appreciated the audience for their concerns as regards upcoming Boro season, and thanked them for their valuable comments and suggestions.

The Minister refuted the fear of lower Aman production in the current season and described the initiatives taken by her government to ensure higher production. She informed the audience that in the current season area for Aman planting has been expanded to an additional 0.6 lakh ha of land which will help to achieve production target with some surplus. She mentioned that rainfall showed an abnormal behaviour in the last season. It came delayed and stayed longer than usual period. This disturbed Aman cultivation and the required intensive irrigation. To ensure timely irrigation, government distributed 'Smart Card' among farmers in the Barind region with a provision of 100 hours free electricity supply for each cardholder. She mentioned, however, that these 100 hours of free electricity has not been utilised as rainfall began in the late season.

*Begum Matia Chowdhury* requested the researchers and journalists to refrain from spreading panic of rice price hike in the coming days. She criticised the audience for evading the news of recent surplus in rice production in Vietnam. She informed that Myanmar has surplus rice and showed interest in exporting it to Bangladesh. She mentioned that the Philippines has shifted from rice production to horticulture, and that is why they are importing rice from international market. She noted that this decision will not affect Bangladesh. Hon'ble Minister also said that Bangladesh will not have to import rice in the near future, and she will also strictly prohibit rice export in the coming months.

The Chief Guest agreed with the audience that despite fixation of procurement price at Tk. 560 per maund, Bangladeshi farmers did not get fair price in the last season. She pointed out various decisions taken by the government to inspire farmers to engage in Boro production in the current season, such as reduction of fertiliser price, increased allocation for agricultural credit, etc.

Regarding seed availability and distribution, the Chief Guest asked the private sector to take action in favour of the farmers. She informed that the government is going to impose some regulations on private seed companies to bring transparency in seed marketing. For example, government will introduce a receipt system in seed trading so that sub-standard seed selling is stopped. She urged the farmers to form cooperatives to protect cheating and deception by private seed companies. She assured the farmers that the government is working towards strengthening the capacity of BADC to enhance seed supply through public channels.

The Minister stressed on the balanced use of fertiliser. She stated that the current price of urea is very reasonable which will help to protect smuggling to neighbouring countries. The government has reduced the price of non-urea fertiliser to encourage balanced use of

fertiliser and reduce the excess use of urea, she added. *Begum Matia Chowdhury* underlined the importance of Guti urea and requested both public and private sectors for formulating and marketing Guti urea applicator.

The Hon'ble Minister informed the audience that the government is thinking to shift the crop dependency gradually from the Boro production because of higher cost. For example, 3,000 liters of water is needed for producing one kg of rice. She mentioned that the government is planning to reduce Boro cultivation in the northern districts where water is scarce, and strengthen the effort in the southern region. She mentioned that the low land area, and saline-prone area of southern districts will be brought under Boro farming where surface water is more available. She expected intensive research and planning from research organisations on this issue so that the government can go ahead with the plan.

*Begum Matia Chowdhury* requested CPD to carry out research which will have long-term consequences. She urged to include all crops when study is conducted on Boro season, and try to see if it is possible to have five seasons a year. She also requested to outline the role of private sector in agricultural production of Bangladesh.

*Begum Matia Chowdhury* reminded a forgotten issue of population control which needs immediate attention. She mentioned that per capita land availability is decreasing overtime due to rapid population growth and urbanisation.

She hoped to achieve the 48 lakh ha area target for Boro cultivation in the current season, and mentioned that the required electricity supply will be ensured through load shedding in the city areas. She also noted that the diesel stock is enough to support the required demand. She requested the public representatives to be involved in creating consciousness among people so that they are aware of the every initiative taken by the government.

The Agriculture Minister concluded her speech by thanking the farmers of Bangladesh for their hard labour for higher production, dedication for agriculture, and attitude to serve the country, Bangladesh. She hoped that the farmers will not disappoint our people, and will make a gift to the nation – another bumper harvest in Boro.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR**

*Professor Rehman Sobhan*, the Chair, thanked everyone for their active participation at the dialogue and valuable inputs. He expressed deep feeling of pride and inspiration as we have a democracy in place where the people of Bangladesh have an Agriculture Minister like *Begum Matia Chowdhury* who has strong commitment and deep knowledge on the subject. The Chair hoped that the suggestions put forward in this dialogue would have some use to the Agriculture Minister. He agreed with some of the participants that if the paper could have been prepared by around November, it might have been even more useful. However, he congratulated the presenter and his team for their very good work. He, then, thanked everybody once again and declared formal closing of the dialogue.

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(in Alphabetical Order)

*Dr Mohammed Zainul Abedin*  
IRRI Representative for Bangladesh

*Mr Sheikh Ahaduzzaman*  
Programme Officer  
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

*Mr C Q K Mostak Ahmed*  
Secretary  
Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh

*Mr Sarwar Ahmed*  
Managing Director  
Syngenta Bangladesh Limited

*Mr Md Ahsanuzzaman*  
Director (Operation), Spectra Hexa Feeds Ltd.

*Mr Mohammad Zamshed Alam*  
Assistant Professor  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University

*Mr Md Shah Alam*  
General Manager, BADC

*Dr M Shahe Alam*  
CSO & Head, Agri Economics Division  
Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI)

*Mr Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir*  
Former State Minister for Agriculture and  
Senior Joint Secretary General  
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

*Mr Murshed Ali*  
President, Bangladesh Krishak Samity

*Mr Syed Ali*  
Director General  
Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), MoA

*Mr Mahbub Anam*  
President, Bangladesh Seed Grower, Dealer & Merchants  
Association

*Advocate A K Azad*  
Advisor, World Peace Organization

*Mr Md Abul Bashar*  
Deputy Director  
Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM), MoA

*Ms Momtaz Begum*  
Statistical Officer, Agriculture Wing  
Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)

*Mr Akram Hossain Chowdhury, MP*  
Naogaon 3 Constituency

*Begum Matia Chowdhury, MP*  
Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture  
Government of Bangladesh

*Ms Mahfuza Akram Chowdhury*  
Executive Director, BRCT

*Dr M Khalequzzaman A Chowdhury*  
Member-Director, BARC

*Dr Uttam Deb*  
Head of Research, CPD

*Mr Anwar Faruque*  
Additional Secretary and  
Director General (Seed), MoA

*Dr Dil Afroz Hoque*  
Member Director (Fertilizer Management), BADC

*Dr Mahabub Hossain*  
Executive Director, BRAC

*Dr Md Ismail Hossain*  
Member Director (Agri-economics), BARC

*Dr A M Muazzam Hussain*  
Former Chairman, Department of Economics and Social  
Sciences, BRAC University

*Dr A S M Nazrul Islam*  
Principal Scientific Officer, BRRI

*Mr M Rafiqul Islam*  
PSO, Agricultural Economics Division, BRRI

*Mr Rafiqul Islam*  
Researcher and Author

*Dr Shahidul Islam*  
National Consultant, FAO

*Mr S M Monwarul Islam*  
Operative Director, Aftab Bahumukhi Farms Ltd.

*Dr M A Jabber*

Chairman, Department of Economics, IUBAT

*Ms Akhtar Jahan*

Director (DS), Agriculture Wing, BBS

*Mr Muhammad Humayun Kabir*

Assistant Professor  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University

*Dr Md Kamruzzaman*

Associate Professor and Head  
Department of Agricultural Economics  
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural  
University (BSMRAU)

*Dr Z Karim*

Chairman, CASEED

*Mr Abdul Mannan, MP*

Member  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on MoA

*Dr M A Hamid Miah*

Liaison Scientist  
International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)

*Mr Md Yousuf Mian*

Director General  
Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI)

*Mr Anisur Rahman Mollick*

General Secretary  
Workers' Party of Bangladesh

*Dr Manoronjan Mondal*

Consultant, BDP

*Mr Anjamul A Munier*

CEO, Karmakutir

*Dr S B Naseem*

Senior Vice President, Energy Pac Agro Ltd

*Mr Md Nuruzzaman*

Member Director  
Seeds and Horticulture, BADC

*Dr Debi Narayan Rudra Paul*

Professor, School of Business, Uttara University

*Mr Md Lutfar Rahman*

Faculty of Business Administration, IUBAT

*Mr Md Mahbubur Rahman*

Additional Director  
Food Planning and Monitoring Unit  
Ministry of Food and Disaster Management

*Mr Waliur Rahman*

General Manager, Janata Bank

*Dr Md Abdur Razzaque*

National Agri/Technology Project  
Former Executive Chairman, BARC

*Mr Abdullah Al Shahin*

Senior Information Officer and  
PRO to the Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture  
Government of Bangladesh

*Dr Md Firoz Shah Shikder*

Director General, BRRRI

*Professor Rehman Sobhan*

Chairman, CPD

*Dr Rezaul Karim Talukder*

National Advisor  
National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme,  
Ministry of Food and Disaster Management

*Mr Shah Md Helal Uddin*

Senior Assistant Secretary  
Ministry of Agriculture

*Professor Dr Khondaker Saif Uddin*

Dean  
Faculty of Agriculture, BSMRAU

## LIST OF JOURNALIST

(in Alphabetical Order)

*Mr Md Ashraf Ali*

Senior Reporter, The Daily Naya Diganta

*Mr Rezaul Bashar*

Staff Correspondent, BD News 24

*Mr Selim Bashar*

Senior Reporter, Radio Today

*Ms Sima Bhowmik*

Staff Reporter, ABC Radio FM 89.2

*Mr Mizanul Haque Bipul*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Jugantor

*Mr Mizan Chowdhury*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Janakantha

*Mr Bishawjit Dutta*

Deputy Editor, The Daily Amader Orthoneeti

*Mr Firoz Ehtesham*

Staff Reporter, Kaler Kantho

*Mr Nejamul Haque*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Ittefaq

*Mr Shawon Hasnat*

Senior Reporter, Bangladesh Television (BTV)

*Mr Rezaul Hoque*

Staff Reporter, Daily Bhorer Dak

*Mr Altaf Hossain*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Samakal

*Mr Md Khadimul Islam*

Senior Staff Correspondent, The New Age

*Mr Mohammad Tauhidul Islam*

Staff Correspondent, Bangla Vision

*Mr S M Jahangir*

Chief Reporter, The Financial Express

*Mr Mohammad Jubayer*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Manab Jamin

*Mr Sultan Mahmud*

Special Correspondent, Islamic Television

*Mr Rahat Minhaz*

Staff Reporter, Channel 1

*Mr A K M Moinuddin*

Staff Reporter, United News of Bangladesh (UNB)

*Mr Sohel Parvez*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Star

*Mr Rahul Raha*

Special Correspondent, ATN Bangla

*Mr Mahburur Rahman*

Reporter, The New Nation

*Mr S M Mizanur Rahman*

Senior Staff Reporter, The Independent

*Mr Sajedur Rahman*

Staff Reporter, The Daily Destiny

*Mr Tarek Rahman*

Reporter, The Independent

*Mr Towhidur Rahman*

Staff Reporter, The Sangbad

*Mr Hasan Imam Rubel*

Senior Reporter, The Prothom Alo

*Mr Abu Md Saif Al Saad*

Staff Reporter, The Executive Times

*Mr Horolal Roy Sagar*

Staff Reporter, Bangladesh Shomoy

*Mr Borhanul Haq Shamrat*

Senior Reporter, News and Current Affairs  
Desh TV

*Mr Sushanta Sinha*

Staff Reporter, ETV (Ekushey Television)