

SRI Progress in Sri Lanka through Oxfam Australia

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Eco-friendly farming / SRI

Even though SRI farming has been promoted over a number of years by OAU, it is perceived to be a labor-intensive method, so farmers do not take it up easily. But due to two changes in context within the country during this year, there has been renewed interest and discussion on this method.

- First, the floods that came in December and again in January/February. People in the north central region noticed that the paddy fields under SRI cultivation had not suffered as severely due to the floods as per the experience in the northeast. OAU used this to do some in-field advocacy, emphasizing SRI as a potential Disaster Risk Reduction technology for paddy farming. A video was produced featuring RGNK and DCF paddy cultivation, focusing on the experience of these farmers during the floods in the Maha season. A seminar was also conducted to share these experiences. Academics who had researched SRI farming made a presentation at this seminar. There was also a separate panel discussion with the farmers and the government officers of the area to highlight the appropriateness of this paddy farming method for Anuradhapura district. There were 3 outcomes from this seminar:
 - (i) The Divisional (DS) office at Thambuttegama requested OAU to provide technical training to their extension officers on eco-friendly farming techniques and on methodologies to train others with the introduced techniques. The Divisional Secretary agreed to develop a joint plan to implement a home gardening and SRI program in the Thambuttegama DS division.
 - (ii) The Ministry of Indigenous Medicine and World Vision Lanka Horowpathana requested OAU to start TOT training on SRI and home gardening for 300 Community Health Workers and voluntary leader-farmers working in 27 DS divisions in Anuradhapura district. After these trainings, it was reported that they have developed about 1500 eco-friendly home gardens during the three months (April-June 2011) in 27 DS divisions in Anuradhapura district where the prevalence of chronic kidney disease is high.
 - (iii) OAU invited students from the Agriculture Faculty of Rajarata University to a seminar on SRI, and based on discussions at the seminar OAU came to an agreement with this University for in-station research on SRI. The University also is in the process of developing in-field research which we hope to conduct with the Monash University in Australia linking these two universities.
- Another change in the context was debate on the presence of arsenic in rice consumed in Sri Lanka, which was revealed through research done in the Rajarata and Kalaniya Universities focusing on Anuradhapura district. It was revealed that the presence of arsenic was the major factor contributing to chronic kidney disease, and that this has been due to the heavy use of pesticides and weedicides in paddy farming. As a result, great interest was generated in environment-friendly paddy farming methods in different sectors who are working with the farmers.

In this context, there were requests from different areas for technical training, technology transfer, and training materials on SRI and eco-friendly farming methods. Based on this, interest in SRI among small-scale paddy farmers has been developed by government and non-governmental organizations. Due to this contextual change, our training materials, videos, etc., which OAU developed for small scale farmers are being used more broadly.

- The SRI Network that was established in 2008 has received increased attention from other organizations during this year. In addition to I/NGOs, certain government departments have also joined its activities and obtained membership. They have started combining with the SRI Network to do their activities. For example, the advocacy programme done at Anuradhapura focusing on home gardening and SRI was a result of a joint effort of the Ministry of Indigenous Medicine, World Vision Lanka Horowpathana, and OAU. The three SRI Network meetings held during the year were focused on regional establishment of demonstrations and long-term partnerships.
- SRI Network also joined with the Grow Campaign initiated by OAU. One regional network was established, and it has created opportunities to promote desirable technologies and convince policy makers. Eg., an invitation was sent to OAU EFF team to participate in a meeting organized by the Ministry of Agriculture on producing and marketing eco-friendly products.
- There were four feature articles on SRI highlighting the farmers who do SRI in national newspapers. The two advocacy programs that were conducted in Anuradhapura were in regional news telecasts twice. One of the radio stations (Neth FM) provided space for broadcasting the techniques through some trainers and farmers on SRI methods for improving production.



Community Health Volunteer at the Anuradhapura Advocacy program



SRI farmer panel at Thambuttegama advocacy program