

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Workshop on Building Alliances around SRI and Agro-ecology

Organized by Oxfam and SRI-Rice, preceding the 2014 International Rice Congress
Maple Hotel, Bangna, Bangkok, Thailand – October 27-28, 2014

This workshop, co-organized by Oxfam and SRI-Rice at Cornell University, focused on an agro-ecological innovation known as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), developed in Madagascar and now spreading around the world. The two organizations have been assisting this dissemination. SRI is a combination of simple methods for rice cultivation that by reducing material inputs (seeds, water, agrochemicals) significantly increase crop yields and give crops resilience to climatic and other hazards. This is achieved by more skillful management of the rice plants, paddy soil, water and nutrients. SRI's modified methods increase the growth of rice roots and mobilize the services of beneficial soil organisms, from microbes to earthworms.

The workshop took advantage of the fact that dozens of persons who work with SRI ideas and methods were coming to Bangkok for the International Rice Congress (IRC) convened October 28-31, 2014. Fifty-one participants from 16 countries and from even more disciplines and professions came together for the workshop (see participant list, Annex 1). This provided a forum for discussing how respective and collaborative efforts can contribute to the more rapid and effective scaling-up of SRI use in participants' countries and regions and around the world. *Research, advocacy* and *action* were all recognized as complementary kinds of initiatives needed to support the up-scaling of SRI use for benefit of farmers, consumers and the environment, focusing particularly on smallholders and marginal households to reduce both poverty and hunger. The workshop proceeded from welcomes and introductory remarks to a series of *panel presentations* that each led into *group work* on specific topics, with reports then made to the whole group in plenary sessions (see workshop agenda, Annex 2). Three broad sets of issues were addressed:

1) Favorable and Unfavorable Factors that Affect SRI Adoption and Success in Scaling-Up. This reviewed sources of progress and impedance, informed by brief summaries of diverse experiences scaling up SRI in Vietnam, Sri Lanka and West Africa, with also a report on participant responses to a survey circulated prior to the workshop asking what they have experienced as positive and negative factors for scaling up SRI.

2) Knowledge Needs for Building Momentum and Support for SRI. There are various sources and uses of knowledge for strengthening SRI contributions to food security and other development goals. Researchers, farmers, NGOs and government staff and policy makers all contribute to and draw from accumulated funds of knowledge. These sessions focused on the kinds of knowledge required by or intended for different sets of actors involved in scaling up SRI.

3) Strategies and Steps for Strengthening International and National Cooperation and Coordination to Promote and Support SRI and Agroecology. These sessions started with working groups focusing on country and regional strategies and activities, in South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal); Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand; Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines); and West Africa and other countries/regions. Later, the discussion was broadened to address strategies for scaling up SRI globally, including the mobilization of financial resources.

Remarks, presentations, and group reports are summarized in more detail in a Workshop Report that is available on request from SRI-Rice (sririce@cornell.edu). This Workshop Summary focuses on insights and consensus that came out of the group work and the plenary discussions, which we hope will be of interest to a wider readership.



1. Embracing Diversity within a Common Framework: SRI, synthesized some 30 years ago in Madagascar by Henri Laulanié, was initially presented in terms of a concrete set of **practices** for improving irrigated rice production. Over the past 20 years, the practices have been widely modified and adapted, not just adopted, to be effective in a diverse set of agro-environments around the globe. The original practices – young, single seedlings, widely spaced, growing in unflooded soil, etc. – are a kind of ‘signature’ for SRI. However, SRI has diversified into a whole suite of practices: for rainfed (unirrigated) rice production; for crop establishment by direct seeding rather than by transplanting; indeed, for many crops beyond rice --- wheat, millet, sugarcane, legumes, etc. The **principles** underlying these adaptations have, at the same time, remained remarkably stable and valid over the past 20 years, and across more than 50 countries.

It was agreed that organizations and professionals facilitating the utilization and spread of SRI ideas should *remain flexible, always learning*, and expecting continuing evolution and change deriving from the original empirical concepts and practices, modifying the latter to suit local conditions. This can create challenges for data collection and research, however, and ultimately for up-scaling. Because SRI is farmer-driven, data can be difficult to access and compare. There is sometimes ambiguity or uncertainty about what qualifies as SRI.

One of the proposals at the workshop was that organizations and programs gathering data on SRI practices and results work with an agreed-upon common format, such as is being developed for SRI initiatives under the WAAPP (West African Agricultural Productivity Program) umbrella in West Africa. This will permit more comparability and aggregation of SRI data than is possible at present. Mapping practices and results across time and across space will make it more feasible to record and assess the effects of applying SRI principles --through concrete practices under different climatic conditions, with different soil systems, different varieties, different market conditions, different labor constraints, etc.¹

2. Strengthening the Knowledge Base for SRI: This was one of the main themes of the workshop, recognizing that many different kinds of knowledge are needed for the spread of SRI -- coming from different sources (kinds of research) and with different knowledge users (audiences).

The amount of formal research being done on SRI according to accepted scientific methodologies continues to expand.ⁱⁱ But much more remains to be done and learned.

Participants felt that it is important to move beyond yield and economic returns, which have been the main focuses of data collection thus far, to develop more holistic and deeper understanding of SRI benefits to farmers, households, communities, and ecologies.

Priority areas identified by the group for research to support scaling-up efforts for SRI included:

- Adoption and dis-adoption of SRI – reasons from farmers’ perspective
- Effects of weeding and weeders on the soil’s microbial properties and on crop performance
- Management of water according to SRI principles for extending SRI use in rainfed areas
- Measuring and demonstrating the SRI impacts on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Evaluation of the performance of indigenous (‘unimproved’) varieties under SRI management and also extension of these practices to a range of other crops
- Gender and health impacts of households’ utilization of SRI methods, and
- Ecological benefits from SRI practice (economic, social and environmental impacts), subjects like in-situ effects on soil health and fertility, or the generation of environmental services at the landscape of basin level. Valid measurements and projections of these things could greatly strengthen the SRI narrative.

There is already an on-line SRI research network with >600 journal articles and research reports.ⁱⁱⁱ But there was agreement that a **more structured network** is needed to address research priorities within the SRI community. It should facilitate greater collaboration, communication and exchange of research publications, research proposals, drafts in progress, publicizing opportunities for research support, etc. This would make it easier, particularly for researchers otherwise in somewhat isolated situations, to function as part of a worldwide SRI community of knowledge.^{iv}

3. Moving Beyond Production: As SRI’s productivity gains have been demonstrated and achieved, the purview of both farmers and those who assist them has been broadening to address the ‘next-generation’ issues of **mechanization** and **marketing**.

a. Mechanization: Even resource-limited households can benefit from mechanization for crop production by increasing their labor productivity. Using simple rice production equipment can not only reduce time and effort put into rice production, but also reduce drudgery and difficulty. Workshop participants repeatedly pointed to the need for more mechanization of SRI operations, and where feasible and appropriate, for motorization of equipment such as transplanters and weeders in order to capitalize on forms of energy beyond man- and woman-power.^v

For SRI to be scaled up to a significant extent, there will need to be improvements in the design, accessibility and use of equipment so as to make SRI practices less labor-intensive and more congenial to practitioners. Participants stressed that the gender dimensions of mechanization need to be kept in mind, to alleviate women rice farmers’ physical burdens and to have equipment that is suitable to women’s needs.

b. Marketing: Now that significant gains in rice productivity are being achieved with SRI methods, many households that were previously in food-deficit are experiencing surpluses of production. Existing marketing systems in many or most parts of the rice-producing world are antiquated, inefficient, or simply exploitative, giving farmers little or no increased benefit from their greater production.

Participants frequently stressed that **marketing systems** need to be improved or revised so that they offer SRI farmers better incentives to expand the scale of their rice production. Concerns about food safety and chemicals used in conventional rice farming as well as SRI's low carbon footprint represent important opportunities. Also, since SRI methods can make significant improvements in the yields of traditional (local, heirloom) varieties of rice, not just of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) and hybrids, attention should be given to developing suitable marketing channels and incentives for such rice production, which usually commands a higher market price because of its higher quality and consumer preferences.

There are already market initiatives underway or planned for SRI farmers in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Thailand, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Vietnam to get better remuneration for SRI-produced rice. Having focused on supply factors from the outset, the SRI community needs to give more thought to capitalizing on factors of demand.

4. Moving into the Policy Arena: There was agreement that the SRI community, while still concerned with production issues at the farm and community levels, needs to focus more on affecting government policies and performance at higher levels. There have been some notable successes in countries like China, India and Vietnam. But having the desired impacts for scaling up SRI will require more engagement on matters of policy. Three points discussed were:

a. Fertilizer subsidies: Governments' current subsidization of chemical fertilizers was seen as a key example of the need to address policy issues. A core principle of SRI is to enhance soil fertility through enrichment and mobilization of 'the life in the soil,' the myriad organisms from microbes to earthworms, that make agriculture more productive and more sustainable. The enhancement of soil organic matter, through compost, mulches, manures (green and otherwise), etc., requires effort as well as access to organic materials. Subsidizing inorganic fertilizers tilts 'the playing field' against biologically-based soil management. Inorganic fertilizers have both economic costs, for farmers and for the whole society, and environmental costs, with declines in soil and water quality and greater soil erosion and degradation. Promoting good stewardship of the land is difficult when government policies, buttressed by commercial interests, distort choices and cover up negative externalities. Such policy issues need to be addressed.

b. Extension services: Another policy area concerns the orientation of agricultural extension services, which have been organized, trained and given incentives to promote and deliver material inputs rather than disseminate and reinforce new ideas. There needs to be a reorientation in the management, culture and philosophy of extension services so that their personnel become more interactive and reciprocating with farmers, not serving as one-way communicators of technical 'fixes' that researchers or commercial interests propose for farmer adoption. A positive externality of SRI work could be to move agricultural R&D away from its present 'linear' model (summarized in the Indian motto 'lab to land') toward more participatory, farmer-centered approaches to research and extension.

c. Role of farmers' organizations: Strong farmers' organizations were also seen as essential for pro-farmer policy change at sub-national, national, and regional levels.

5. Multi-Sector Alliances: In a number of countries, national forums or organizations for SRI have been created over the last half dozen years and have been a source of innovation and dynamism.^{vi} These are quite diverse in their membership, combining both individual and institutional attachment, and bringing together some combination of government, NGO and private sector participants. There was a desire for SRI colleagues in all countries to be able to

know more about how their counterparts in other countries have organized themselves, identifying advantages and disadvantages in each kind of structure or alliance.

Oxfam and SRI-Rice which have been working with SRI colleagues in a large number of countries will continue corresponding and liaising to nurture national capacities for collaboration and coordination wherever persons and organizations within a country emerge with an intention to spread SRI knowledge and opportunities. This strategy is as much as can currently be done with the limited resources available. Oxfam and SRI-Rice continue looking for the kinds and level of support that would enable them to help make the whole SRI effort internationally more than the sum of its national parts.

Participants raised the possibility that SRI could gain support from allying with regional organizations. For example, by working with the World Bank-funded West African Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP), which operates under the aegis of ECOWAS, the *Economic Community of West African States*, there is now a funding structure in place to support evaluation, demonstration and extension of SRI in 13 West African countries. It was suggested that SRI colleagues in South Asia try to connect with SAARC, the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation*, and similarly that colleagues in Southeast Asia explore possibilities with ASEAN, the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations*. Similar regional associations exist in Latin America and Eastern and Southern Africa. SRI-Rice is working with IICA, the *Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation* to get SRI more widely known and utilized there.

6. Reaching Out for Broader Alliances: Over time, there has been increasing support from NGOs and government agencies, with donor agencies and international NGOs supporting initiatives in various countries. However, for further scaling up, additional resources are urgently needed for research, synthesis, extension, communication, and advocacy. Participants discussed ways to improve communication and collaboration in order to mobilize financial resources more effectively from both traditional sources (governments and donor agencies) and non-conventional sources, reviewed in the Workshop Report.

It was suggested that SRI can and should be linked to various other issues besides food security on the agendas of governments, foundations and development agencies, so as to build a broader base of support. This includes engaging with ministries other than Agriculture, e.g., Rural Development, Health, Irrigation, Water Resources, Planning. Participants listed a number of connections that they see or are already making to fit SRI into governmental, private, or non-governmental initiatives on a broader scale, for example:

- a. **Climate-smart agriculture** – It should be stressed what SRI methods can do to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the agricultural sector’s demand for water, also making crops more resilient to the hazards of climate change: drought, storm damage, flooding, increased pests and diseases, etc., while increasing crop productivity.
- b. **Water saving** – Governments and donors must pay increasing attention to how to grow more rice with less water (more crop per drop). There is substantial evidence that SRI management reduces water requirements and raises water productivity. This could become a stronger selling point for SRI acceptance and support than its contribution to food production.
- c. **Gender impacts** – Reducing the labor requirements and drudgery for women in rice production, also reducing women’s injuries and health hazards from rice cultivation, e.g., working in stagnant water. Male migration patterns in many Asian countries are putting most

or all of the burden of rice production on women, which makes these effects more important to consider.

- d. **Health and nutrition** – Rice being a major source of calories for half of the world’s people means that producing it without or with less use of agrochemicals has many benefits. Research findings indicate greater uptake of micronutrients and their higher levels in SRI grain. Stopping flooding reduces the habitats for mosquitoes which transmit malaria, dengue fever, and Japanese encephalitis. Food safety concerns are becoming greater. We expect research to show that arsenic uptake and its concentration in rice gains will be less with SRI’s unflooded soil (although we need to consider whether this would bring offsetting increases in cadmium).
- e. **Corporate social responsibility** – This is becoming an increasing issue and opportunity in a number of countries. There were a number of examples cited.^{vii}
- f. **Self-help**: Self-help groups, particularly of women, are becoming attractive to donors and NGOs. The rapid spread of SRI in the Indian state of Bihar benefited from women’s self-help groups.^{viii}

7. **SRI Conferences**: While there have been a number of national workshops and conferences on SRI, there has been no international SRI conference since the first one, held in April 2002 in Sanya, China.^{ix} It was agreed that an international exchange of SRI experience and innovations such as the Sanya event is overdue, although this must on a larger scale.

Such an event will require considerable financing and administrative capacity, neither of which is currently available. Possibly regional SRI conferences for South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Africa (or all of Africa), and Latin America could be organized. Participants will look for opportunities to plan SRI-focused panels or presentations linked with international or regional meetings of relevant professional organizations or topical events as a next-best-thing.^x

8. **2014 International Rice Congress**: On the morning of the second day, time was devoted to discussing how participants could best contribute to and learn from the International Rice Congress. Oxfam and SRI-Rice had arranged to have a SRI booth in the Exhibition Hall. Six papers proposed to the IRC organizers were accepted for oral presentations on the scientific panels that were planned. Also, 35 posters on SRI experience and research findings were accepted for display at the IRC in the Exhibition Hall. Booth information and handouts, oral presentations, and posters are all available on the SRI-Rice website.^{xi}

Participants worked on a communique to be sent to senior representatives of the international rice research community at IRC, highlighting the research and development contributions of the SRI global community was presented for discussion in the morning plenary. Various suggestions were incorporated into the final communique (Annex 3).

The statement from the workshop was delivered the next day to the Director-General of IRRI, who arranged for a meeting on Friday afternoon before the end of the Congress with representatives of Oxfam and SRI-Rice. It was agreed that steps would be taken to improve communication and cooperation between IRRI and the SRI community.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Information on the WAAPP initiative is available from Erika Styger at eds8@cornell.edu.

ⁱⁱ This can be seen from the presentation by Styger at the IRC, reviewing 600+ refereed journal articles on SRI: <http://www.slideshare.net/SRI.CORNELL/1424-system-of-rice-intensification-research-a-review>.

ⁱⁱⁱ The SRI research network is accessible through <http://sri.cals.cornell.edu/research/index.html>, which links to an online searchable RefWorks SRI database as well as a Mendeley SRI research group.

^{iv} A group of SRI researchers met the next day (October 29) at the Maple Hotel to follow up on this initiative. SRI colleagues were encouraged to keep sending materials that could be of use to others within the SRI community, to Lucy Fisher at SRI-Rice (lhf2@cornell.edu) for posting to be made available widely and free around the world.

^v This was the subject of a post-IRC workshop planned and co-sponsored by SRI-Rice and the Asian Centre for Innovation in Sustainable Agricultural Intensification (ACISAI) at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), November 1-3. See: http://sri.cals.cornell.edu/conferences/SRI_Equipment_Workshop1110

^{vi} Examples include the National Consortium for SRI (NCS) in India, the Japanese Association for SRI (J-SRI), the Indonesian Association for SRI (Ina-SRI, which kept the acronym I-SRI for an eventual International Association for SRI), SRI-Pilipinas in the Philippines, SRI-Mas in Malaysia, the SRI Network in Sri Lanka (SRIN), the Bangladesh SRI National Steering Committee, and a national SRI steering committee in Laos. Elsewhere, SRI support has been taken up by an existing organization, e.g., the Ghana Rice Inter-Professional Body (GRIB) or the Community of Hope for Agricultural Progress (CHAP) in Liberia; or has its own list-serve as in Nepal; or gets support from a governmental secretariat as in Cambodia; or has periodic meetings of a committee of stakeholders as in Kenya. The forms for national-level collaboration for SRI thus vary widely.

^{vii} The Indian and Indonesian governments now require companies, by law, to invest some of their earnings in public-benefit activities under the rubric of CSR. Examples from India included the Tata Group, Usha Martin, Ambuja Cement, and the Reliance Group; and from Indonesia, PT Sampoerna, MEDCO, Garuda Airlines, and Marathon Oil.

^{viii} See report prepared for the World Bank (2013) on *Enhancing Agricultural Livelihoods through Community Institutions in Bihar, India*, available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/01/17517688/enhancing-agricultural-livelihoods-through-community-institutions-bihar-india>.

^{ix} See proceedings at <http://sri.cals.cornell.edu/conferences/index.html#sanya>

^x One possibility is the 2nd International Conference on Global Food Security, which will be held at Cornell University, October 11-14, 2015, in Ithaca, NY: <http://www.globalfoodsecurityconference.com/>

^{xi} See http://sri.cals.cornell.edu/conferences/IRC2014/Bangkok_International_SRI_events_2014.html. The papers accepted for oral presentations were:

- *The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in India: Historical antecedents, present dynamics, and future possibilities*, Harro Maat and Rob Schipper, Wageningen University; Dominic Glover, IDS, Sussex, UK; Debashish Sen, People's Science Institute, India; Sabarmatee, SAMBHAV, India; Ravindra, WASSAN, India; and C. Shambu Prasad, Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, India.
- *System of Rice Intensification research: A review*, Erika Styger, SRI-Rice;
- *System of Rice Intensification research in China: Research dynamics, adaptations and innovations*, Zhoucun Feng and Erika Styger, SRI-Rice.
- *Assessment of System of Rice Intensification (SRI) for its potential to enhance the productivity of rice*, R. Mahinder Kumar and colleagues at the Directorate of Rice Research, Hyderabad, India.
- *Improving the phenotypic expression of rice genotypes: Reasons to rethink selection practices and 'intensification' for rice production systems*, Norman Uphoff, SRI-Rice; Vasilias Fasoula, University of Georgia, USA; Amir Kassam, UK; Iswandi Anas, Indonesia; and Amod Thakur, India;
- *User adaptations in water management for rice farmers in Uttarakhand, India: Landscape and farm-level interactions and negotiation*, Debashish Sen, People's Science Institute, India, and Harro Maat, Wageningen University.

Annex 1: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS, BANGKOK, OCTOBER 27-28, 2014

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**Annex 2: AGENDA FOR WORKSHOP ON BUILDING ALLIANCES
AROUND SRI AND AGROECOLOGY**, organized by Oxfam and SRI-Rice, preceding
2014 International Rice Congress, Maple Hotel, Bangna, Bangkok, Thailand – October 27-28, 2014

MONDAY, OCT. 27TH

Registration (7:30 – 8:00) in the workshop meeting room at Maple Hotel

I. OPENING SESSION (8:00-8:45)

- A. **Welcomes** from Oxfam and from SRI-Rice
- B. **Overview** of workshop purpose and logic
- C. **Self-introductions** by participants

II. CONSIDERATION OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE FACTORS THAT AFFECT SRI ADOPTION AND SUCCESS IN SCALING-UP (8:45-9:45)

- A. **Overview** of institutional landscapes and sources of progress and impedance
- B. **Experiences with scaling-up** – brief summaries from Vietnam, Sri Lanka and West Africa
- C. Summary of **pre-workshop survey** responses on positive & negative factors in scaling up SRI
- D. Brief discussion, and group assignments for parallel smaller group discussions after tea break

TEA BREAK, with poster viewing and networking (9:45-10:00)

E. Parallel group discussions of positive and negative factors to consider in scaling-up efforts (10:00 – 11:00)

The groups have been constituted for a diversity of viewpoints; facilitators and rapporteurs are designated so that the groups can engage quickly with the issues to be discussed, formulating a listing and ranking of factors to be reported back to the workshop as a whole

- F: **Group reports to plenary**, with discussion and summarization by facilitators (11:00-11:25)
-- with 'stretch' before next session (11:25-11:30)

III. KNOWLEDGE NEEDS FOR BUILDING MOMENTUM/SUPPORT FOR SRI (11:30-12:30)

- A. Summary of **study on adoption rates & pre-workshop survey responses** on knowledge needs
- B. **Knowledge web** and knowledge needs affecting adoption and scaling-up of SRI in India
- C. **Data gathering**, cumulating, analysis, and sharing on the spread and impacts of SRI
- D. Knowledge needs for SRI **low-risk/low-carbon market development** in Vietnam
- E. Discussion in preparation for parallel discussion groups to meet after lunch

LUNCH (12:30 – 1:30)

F. Parallel group discussions on knowledge needs for national strategies and plans (1:30-2:30)

- 1: **Knowledge with formal research methods**, can include farmer participatory research
 - 2: **Field-oriented knowledge** that capitalizes on less formal sources of knowledge
 - 3: **Knowledge for institutional and policy support**, incl. advocacy and public understanding
- These three focuses are not exclusive categories, as there can be connections between and among them; the respective kinds of knowledge are intended for different sets of actors in SRI scaling-up

- G. **Group reports to plenary** (2:30-2:45)

TEA BREAK (2:45-3:00)

IV. PROSPECTIVE COUNTRY/REGIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES (3:00-4:00)

- A. South Asia (I):** India, Sri Lanka, Nepal
- B. South Asia (II):** India, Sri Lanka, Nepal
- C. Southeast Asia (I):** Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand
- D. Southeast Asia (II):** Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines
- E. West Africa and other countries/regions**
- F. Reports to plenary** on group discussions on national initiatives and strategies (4:00-4:45)
- G. Wrap-up of Day 1 (4:45)**

WORKSHOP DINNER (7:00-9:00)

TUESDAY, OCT. 28TH

Recap from Day 1 and introduction of Day 2 (8:00 – 8:15)

V. PLANS FOR PROMOTING SRI KNOWLEDGE/OPPORTUNITIES AT 4TH IRC (8:15-9:15)

- Booth plans; SRI-related presentations; SRI posters; coverage of panel sessions
- Introduction of workshop joint recommendations to IRC

VI. ACTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS FOR SRI (9:15-10:15)

Parallel group discussions on international and national collaboration for SRI up-scaling

- A. Strategies and Steps for Strengthening International Cooperation and Coordination** to Promote and support SRI/agroecology, including developing cross-national alliances, e.g.
 - Development of gathering, cumulation and exchange of data
 - Support for collaborative research on SRI effects and impacts
 - International and regional meetings? -- Sanya II? SEA, WA or LAC meetings?
 - Links with like-minded international organizations, related professional organizations

- B. Strategies and Steps for Strengthening National Cooperation and Coordination** to promote and support SRI and agroecology, including support to alliances at the country level
 - Uses of the internet and social media
 - Strengthening national networks
 - Dissemination of new knowledge, progress updates, etc.

- C. Strategies and Steps for Mobilizing Financial Resources** to support research and scaling up of SRI and agroecology, e.g.
 - Liaison with donor agencies, philanthropists, INGOs, etc.
 - Alerts on fund-raising opportunities and possible coordination mechanisms
 - Linkages to fair-trade, organic, carbon-trading and other schemes

TEA BREAK (10:15-10:30)

- D. Reports to plenary** summarizing/prioritizing/developing collective plans (10:30-11:30)

VII. WRAP-UP SESSION (11:30-12:00) -- next steps, evaluations, closing

LUNCH (12:00 – 1:00) -- Shuttles depart about 1:30 pm to BITEC for opening session of IRC

Annex 3: OPEN LETTER TO THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL RICE CONGRESS

The 4th International Rice Congress (IRC2014) is taking place 27 October - 1 November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand. The IRC2014 theme is “*Rice for the World*”. The IRC is a quadrennial event that brings together researchers, government representatives, business interests, civil society participants, and rice producers.

This meeting of the IRC comes at an opportune time, when climate change, food insecurity and poverty are challenges to people’s prosperity and our planet’s sustainability. Rice is an important crop for food security, national economies, and ecological systems.

Given these challenges, we who work with the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) as scientists, practitioners, and private sector and government actors, are pleased to attend the Congress and to share the results of our research and field experience. We have abundant evidence that the use of SRI concepts and methods can contribute immediately and effectively to raising crop productivity, reducing rice crop water requirements, making crops more resistant to the hazards of climate change, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

2014 is the International Year of Family Farming – a reminder to the international community of its obligations to work with smallholder family farms to improve the quality of their lives and their farming systems. This year has galvanized concrete initiatives and policies aimed at mobilizing resources and improving access to land, water, and other inputs and natural resources. Smallholder farmers and their organizations have been working together to bring greater attention and resources to the promotion of agro-ecology and farmers’ control over their production. Especially their ownership of seeds should be strengthened, ensuring respect to their rights and traditions.

It is important that IRC support agro-ecological production methods such as SRI, as these can utilize more productively the resources that are available to farmers with positive effects on soil and environmental quality. SRI is a principle-based management system that has gained wide popularity among resource-poor farmers, conscious consumers, social entrepreneurs, and sustainable supply chains. SRI management practices have been shown to give more productive plants (phenotypes) from practically all varieties (genotypes). Knowledge and use of SRI has spread largely through the efforts of international and national NGOs, farmers’ organizations, and research organizations in over 50 countries.

This IRC has provided opportunities to share this knowledge and experience, but we hope that the 5th Congress will give greater attention to agro-ecological practices and opportunities such as SRI given the productivity and sustainability challenges that agriculture faces. SRI can provide multiple benefits to farmers, their communities, and the environment: reducing water usage, increasing yield and input efficiency, and improving resilience in a changing climate.

These modifications in practice are changing the lives of farmers and their communities. As a part of a larger agro-ecological movement, SRI is also helping to address the vitally important issues of justice in food and agriculture – that is, who gets access to what resources and how these decisions get made. There are over 600 publications, including the large body of scientific research from China, which provide scientific validation and explanation for these ideas and methods.

We would like to work with the International Rice Research Institute and the rest of the rice science community to address the pressing issues facing rice farmers. Farmers are not only producers; they are innovators, particularly when the right conditions exist to build on their knowledge of the specific techniques that work in their respective situations, taking into account their natural resource constraints, soil conditions and weather patterns, as well as social and cultural considerations.

We would like to draw the attention of the global rice community to:

- Collaborate with farmers' organizations on research that is particularly relevant to improving the situation of resource-limited and food-insecure rice farmers, developing more beneficial sustainable value chains, more adequate technologies and investment, and improving market access.
- Give more attention to issues of concern to farmers and their organizations, such as risk management at the plot and landscape levels, models for accessing financing credit that work for farmers, and land tenure issues. Also, attention needs to be given to producing small farm machinery that can help farmers overcome constraints such as labor.
- Involve farmers and their organizations in the design of research: farmers' organizations should be endowed with more capacity for independent analysis, critical assessment and monitoring.
- Work with the SRI community, which includes a wide range of disciplines and occupations. Our experience and research is showing that by providing more conducive growing environments to rice plants their genetic potentials can be more fully expressed for the benefit of both farmers and consumers.

Sincerely,

Le Nguyet Minh
Global Agriculture Advisor
Oxfam

Erika Styger
Director of SRI-Rice
Cornell University