

Speech by
His Excellency Dr. Chan Sarun, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
at the Closing Ceremony of the Meeting on
“Lessons Learnt and SRI Techniques Reflection from 2008-2009”

Excellencies, National and International Guests!
Ladies, Gentlemen, and Dear Farmers!

It is my great pleasure today to be here once again with Your Excellencies, ladies, gentlemen, national and international guests, and all of our farmers at this closing ceremony of a most important meeting on “Lessons Learnt and SRI Techniques Reflection” at this moment in time. Taking this opportunity, I would like to appreciate and highly commend the efforts made by the SRI Secretariat of the General Directorate of Agriculture for their initiative in organizing such a meeting to sum up the progress of SRI work, presenting the results of research and experimentation of relevant institutions, exchanging experiences to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to formulate strategies to promote the implementation and development of better SRI in Cambodia. At the same time, I would also like to extend my profound thanks to development partners, especially CEDAC and Oxfam America for their good cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to enhance SRI application in Cambodia.

Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen, and Our Dear Farmers!

Allow me to remind you a bit the substance of the System of Rice Intensification, called SRI for short. It is a combination of best techniques and practices to help growing rice and ensure high yield based on the plants’ natural potential. In this sense, practitioners should clearly understand key techniques and favorable factors for rice production, and try their own best to wisely adapt those techniques to practical regional circumstances.

Based on the results obtained from this meeting, we can conclude that SRI application in Cambodia has remarkably developed, starting from just 28 families back in 1999 and expanded to 104,750 families in 2008, enjoying an average rice yield of 3.5 tons per hectare. If we compare average yield of rainy season rice of just 2.54 tons per hectare to the SRI yields, we can see a 1 ton increase per hectare. Hence, promoting SRI application is the key factor to increase rice production, and it would largely contribute to the assurance of food security in Cambodia, especially in a situation of world food crisis, and help generating income for farmers, alleviating rural poverty and contributing to the economic growth that is a priority direction of the Royal Government. On top of that, the meeting also discussed and agreed upon training activities, dissemination of research experimentation results, and mechanisms to promote cooperation and application of SRI in Cambodia.

Together with this big success, SRI application is facing some challenges on technical and coordination aspects and financial collaboration. To promote further advances in SRI development and its application in Cambodia, and to achieve better and new results, I would like to recommend as follows:

1. The Department of Rice Crop of the General Directorate of Agriculture, with SRI Secretariat being the headquarter, shall actively and broadly promote SRI application by collaborating with relevant institutions and development partners playing the role of implementing leader, providing technical advice and training, and doing monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, the Department of Agricultural Extension shall promote the publication of technical documents and draw best practices, and by all means broadly disseminate them to farmers.

2. The Cambodian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) shall promote additional research to acquire new techniques that are appropriate to farmers, so that they can accept and absorb and increase productivity and economic efficiency of SRI application as well as cover crops for sustainable soil quality conservation.
3. Provincial Departments of Agriculture shall promote SRI application in their provinces through experimenting with rice farming and increasing the number of farmers and area of SRI practices. Beyond this, Provincial Departments of Agriculture shall incorporate budget for SRI in their annual plan and try to communicate and submit budget requests for SRI through the National Committee for Democratic Development at sub-national level (NCDD).
4. Encourage private sector involvement as a partner in the agricultural development community to ensure community capacity expansion on funding ability, techniques, production management, and agricultural crop processing chain, and to ensure market stability through the implementation of production contracts. In particular, they are also to prepare at all levels to accept and ensure employment by all means over those workers who return from urban areas back to their home villages amid the current world economic crisis.
5. The three Agricultural Schools, namely the Royal University of Agriculture, Prek Leap National School of Agriculture, and Kampong Cham National School of Agriculture, shall motivate research studies by sending students to conduct research and write theses to assess sound technical aspects to the conditions of each region and provide recommendations to better help directing SRI.

I would encourage all participants to bring with them all the lessons learnt for further dissemination, especially to minimize the use of agricultural pesticides and to help in communicating to the nearest technical officers any improper use of chemicals on agricultural crops exporting to markets.

I would like to positively affirm the aforementioned results of the meeting. Once again allow me to express my thanks to Your Excellencies, ladies, gentlemen, and all of our beloved farmers for their active and in-depth discussion at this meeting. Finally, I would like to wish Excellencies, ladies, gentlemen, and all of our dear farmers, prosperity, success, and happiness.

I declare the official closure of the meeting from now on. Thank you.