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Bangladesh, India to cooperate on high-yielding rice seeds

Star Business Desk

Seed bodies of India and Bangladesh yesterday formalised a move to cooperate on expediting trade of high-yielding varieties (HYV) of rice seeds for the benefit of the farmers of the two countries, and help boost food security.

Syed AKM Asadul Amin Dadan, general secretary of the Bangladesh Seeds Association (BSA), and Kalyan Goswami, executive director of the National Seed Association of India (NSAI), signed a memorandum of understanding at a meeting organised by CUTS International, at the conclusion of a two-year research and advocacy project.

The memorandum aims to aid traders, exporters and importers of both the countries to initiate cross-border trade in HYV rice seeds, as well as enable a favourable environment for knowledge-sharing in HYV rice seeds production and trade, CUTS International said in a statement.

It will also catalyse closer ties between the two South Asian nations, particularly between Bangladesh and the eastern states of India, and help boost food security in the region.

The Addressing Barriers to Rice Seeds Trade between India and Bangladesh project was supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

“Due to non-existence of formal trade of HYV of rice seed, steps can be taken to formalise rice seeds trade and knowledge-sharing which will ensure greater cooperation in agriculture between Bangladesh and India,” said Salahuddin Noman Chowdhury, Bangladesh's deputy high commissioner in India.

Many new and promising rice varieties have been developed in India and Bangladesh, and farmers in the region can benefit if varieties released in one country can be cultivated quickly in neighbouring countries with similar agro-climatic conditions, said Rajesh Kumar Singh, joint secretary (seeds) of the Indian agriculture ministry.

In Bangladesh and India, serious problems with making a variety of rice seeds available and accessible to farmers prevail as a significant gap exists between demand and supplies of most desired and adaptable varieties, said Bipul Chatterjee, deputy executive director of CUTS International.

The demand-supply gap often results in the use of regenerated rice seeds for several years, compromising rice yield and productivity and leads to informal rice seeds trade, he said.

“Increased cooperation between the two countries can significantly improve the situation,” he added.

The countries now need to map the processes of releasing one country's rice varieties in others, so that formal trade and cooperation can be realised efficiently, a point demonstrated by Suresh P Singh, policy analyst CUTS International, and Mahfuz Kabir, senior research fellow of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, at the meeting.