

REPORT

Exposure visit for ARP (Agricultural Rights Programme) farmers and staff



On the 26 of September'2013 a group of six ARP farmers, three DEW staff and one DEW intern went on an exposure visit to the Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute (BSRI) and the Horticulture Research Centre. The purpose of the visit was to introduce the ARP farmers to new agricultural research that can enable them to diversify their own agricultural practices and in turn diversify their livelihoods. This is also a way of bridging the gap between small-scale farmers and government authorities. In addition to this, it was also an important opportunity for capacity building of DEW's staff.

At the Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute the group attended an interesting lecture on sugarcane cultivation and intercropping, held by Mr. Mostak Ahmed, scientific officer. It was pointed out that the FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations) recommends that the annual sugar intake per year and person should be 13 kilograms. As of today, Bangladesh is unable to meet the domestic demand for sugar, thus large quantities of sugar are imported.

BSRI have been working extensively on developing sugarcane varieties that are suitable for the Bangladeshi climate and the local growing conditions. This is an ongoing process. BSRI has developed 41 high yielding sugarcane varieties. The research institute has developed varieties that are resistant to various threats such as floods, red rot, waterlogging, and droughts etc.

Sugarcane typically takes 12-14 months to mature, which is a long time to wait for revenue for a small-scale farmer. However, farmers can use the technique of intercropping when cultivating sugarcane. Basically, between the rows of sugarcane the farmer can grow rice, and

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when the rice is harvested there can grow potatoes, and then mung beans. There are various crops that are suitable for this, such as garlic, onion, cauliflower etcetera. The main point is that a farmer who is growing sugarcane can grow other crops through intercropping which provides the farmer with an income in the meantime, until the sugarcane is ready to be harvested. The technique is suitable for single rows and paired rows both. To gain access to BSRI's sugarcane varieties farmers must participate in a training session where they are instructed on the specific cultivation practices as well as the appropriate use of fertilizers and pesticides.

At the nearby Horticulture Research Centre the group was shown around the premises by a scientific officer from the Olericulture Division. The research centre is conducting comprehensive research on various fruits, vegetables and grain crops. An environmentally friendly method of killing off pests in rice seedlings consists of the practice of covering the seedlings with a plastic tarp for 4-6 weeks. A small-scale greenhouse effect works its magic leaving the seedlings ready for cultivation. The research centre possesses a demonstration paddy of organically grown rice. The green colour of the organic rice was indistinguishable from the conventionally grown rice in the background paddy. An aquaponics system with shallow waters suitable for catfish cultivation was situated in front of the organic rice paddy.

Overall, it proved to be a fruitful day of learning. The ARP farmers and the DEW staff alike brought with them new ideas and thoughts on agriculture.





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ARP farmers looking at the organic rice paddy and the aquaponics system