

Learning and experiences
of the PETRRA project, BANGLADESH

BOOK: 6/10

Communication –
getting messages to stakeholders



PETRRA – an experiment in pro-poor agricultural research

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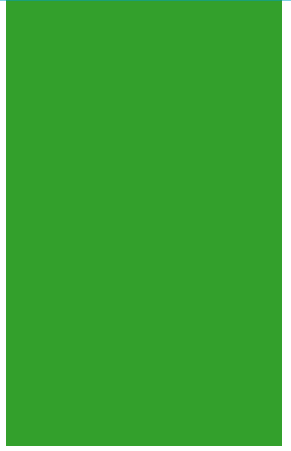
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Bangladesh Rice Research Institute

Poverty Elimination Through Rice
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Book 6. Communication – getting messages to stakeholders





Communication – getting messages to stakeholders

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INTRODUCTION

Communication or getting messages to stakeholders grew in importance over the life of Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project; to the point that it was given output-level status on the logical framework. In other words it was essential for PETRRA to achieve its purpose-level objectives.

It could be asked why has communication become so important? Public-funded research is for improving the livelihoods of poor households and there has been a growing demand for accountability in delivering impact from that research. At one level, the agricultural research community has neglected to communicate its importance in the fight to reduce poverty. At another level, researchers have not considered the packaging of their research in simple messages for farmers and extension service providers. The evolution of Department for International Development (DFID) policy in development has given greater emphasis to lesson learning and communicating with stakeholders. That provided a supportive environment, but the actual discovery by sub-project (SP) partners of the effect of good communication led to considerable experimentation and an excitement amongst partners to actually market their learning to others.

PETRRA started in September 1999. PETRRA did not develop a comprehensive communication strategy until February 2002 through assistance from IRRI Los Baños public relations

section. There was a broad two-pronged approach:

- targeting the government (GO) and non-governmental organisation (NGO) policy makers, donors, research managers, scientists, and extension managers; and
- targeting the end-users of the innovations, namely, farmers and GO-NGO extension workers.

THE MAIN MESSAGES

PETRRA SPs can be divided into three categories and each category had its own message to communicate to its audience:

- Category 1: Technology identification, development and validation SPs;
- Category 2: Uptake methods research SPs; and
- Category 3: Policy SPs.

For category 1, the technology SPs, the messages developed were kept simple for easy communication with farmers and field level extension workers. Cost effectiveness and suitability were also important criteria. The participatory methods that were used for technology development actually provided an early platform for emphasising communication as participating farmers became informal extension agents. The SP equipped these people with extension materials for technology that they had a very real role in developing. The potential contribution of the respective technology was something that was also communicated

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with policy makers and research managers.

For category 2, uptake methods research SPs, the extension methods being innovated were described in flow charts on posters. There was experimentation with participatory video for women, picture songs and going public as means of improving communication. In addition, the extension methods were documented in a story form in the international publication 'Innovations in rural extension: case studies from Bangladesh' (Van Mele et al, 2005).

Category 3 were the policy SPs and for these, policy dialogues were used to gain the attention of policy makers concerned with agriculture and poverty reduction. The dialogues were supplemented with the provision of briefs in which the policy research was highlighted along with recommendations.

CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

The following highlights the different media used for communication:

Newsletters

Two newsletters were published semi-annually, separately in English and Bangla, to a large extent re-using materials (quarterly report summaries, press and photo releases). As the English and Bangla newsletters had different target audiences, the contents did not mirror each other, but there was considerable overlap. The target audience for the English newsletter *Interface* included policy planners, donors, and national and international NGOs; the Bangla newsletter *Dhanadhanya* targeted literate farmers and extension workers. These newsletters contained PETRRA's latest innovations and learning along with news and views on important upcoming events.

All the enlisted stakeholders received PETRRA newsletters (English & Bangla)

during the project period. There were four English newsletters and one Bangla newsletter published.

National & regional communication fairs

PETRRA used the fair to bring all the SP partners under one umbrella and enable them to share their results in one location. This helped build linkages. Since PETRRA dealt mostly with technology and research, it was important that the general people along with GO-NGO policy makers were also informed and linked with its activities. Keeping this in mind, two central communication fairs were organised in 2002 and 2003 as part of the communication strategy.

PETRRA encouraged its SPs to organise the fair at two levels – national and regional. At the national level the communication fair in 2002 and 2003 primarily targeted policy makers, donors, GOB, media and like-minded organisations while at the local level the village fair brought together primary and intermediate stakeholders like farmers, extension workers, local government



representatives, rice actors etc. Regional fairs on seed drying and storage technology were organised by Agricultural Advisory Society (AAS) in collaboration with local farmers at Shait Kahon village of Pakundia upazila under Kishoreganj district about 100 km. north-east from Dhaka. A village fair was organised by the On-farm Research Division (OFRD) of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Rangpur office in collaboration with the local farmers at Saidpur village of Pirgacha upazila, Rangpur, north-west region. A two-day agricultural technology communication fair on agri-technologies developed by the participating farmers was organised by AAS at Sreemangal, Maulvi Bazar, in the north-east region. Shushilan also organised a village fair in a village in Kaliganj upazila in 2002. The fair was organised as part of the Shushilan method of technology dissemination. PETRRA SP partners also attended different agriculture fairs organised nationally and regionally by other agencies. Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) in collaboration with the north-west focal area forum scheduled a final fair in the first week of August 2004 to which all PETRRA SPs and other local offices of different agricultural agencies were invited. This became a regional policy dialogue for discussing the focal area forum concept. The honourable state minister for agriculture participated and endorsed the focal area forum approach.

The objective of the national communication fairs was to inform interested persons and organisations of the PETRRA portfolio of ongoing research, experiences and results to date. It also provided an opportunity for stakeholders engaged in PETRRA subprojects to touch base with each other and to see how their SPs fitted into the larger picture. In addition it allowed donors and prospective donors to learn more about this innovative



new approach to organising and delivering development aid.

The one-day fair in 2002 was held at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) campus inaugurated by the honourable minister for agriculture. This fair was limited to the researchers, farmers, SP participants and agriculture practitioners.

The two-day fair in 2003 was a special event as it coincided with the first-ever holding of the IRRI Board of 'Trustees' (BoT) meeting in Bangladesh. The honourable minister for agriculture M. K. Anwar inaugurated the fair. The IRRI BOT Chairperson, Angeline S. Kamba, along with other trustees and IRRI director general, Dr. Ronald P. Cantrell were present in the inauguration. The inauguration ceremony was attended by some 500 guests in the Ball Room of Hotel Sheraton. The BOT had an opportunity to see the many exciting technologies coming up in Bangladesh.

There were 47 stalls covering activities taking place in technology development, research on dissemination pathways and methods and policy research. PETRRA, its SPs, BRRI, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADCO), Bangladesh Rice Foundation (BRF), and Forum for Information Dissemination on Agriculture (FIDA) also provided display comprising books, posters, brochures, leaflets, technologies and research outcomes. Some 80 male and female farmers participated in the fair along with



researchers to discuss their experience. As part of the fair, a seminar entitled 'PETRRA and the poor' was held at the same venue in the afternoon of the first day. Dr. Abdul Bayes, Professor of Economics of Jahangirnagar University presented the keynote with Dr. Quazi Shahabuddin, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in the chair. Professor A. M. Muazzam Husain of BRAC University, Dr. Binayak Sen of BIDS and Dr. A. R. Gomosta, Director-Research of BIRRI took part in the discussion.

On the 2nd day, another seminar entitled 'Challenges for communication of agriculture research results' was held at the same venue with Professor M. Shamsheer Ali, Vice Chancellor of South East University in the chair. Sykh Seraj, famous agricultural journalist and Director of the popular private satellite television channel, *Channel-i*, presented the keynote at the seminar. Dr. Golam Rahman, Professor of Mass Communication and Journalism of Dhaka University (DU) and President of FIDA; Dr. A. R. Gomosta, Director-Research of BIRRI; Fazlul Haque Rikabdar, Director of Agriculture Information Service (AIS); Tariq Hassan, director general of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE); and Reaz Ahmad, Senior Reporter of the national English daily, The Daily Star and FIDA General Secretary, took part in the discussion.

For 2004 a one-day fair, known as the PETRRA closing celebration 2004, was organised mainly to celebrate the successful closing of the five-year PETRRA project, was held at Winter Garden of Hotel Sheraton, Dhaka. In the morning session there was a dialogue on 'Agriculture technology and innovations for the poor'. The aim of this dialogue was to exchange views towards sustaining the innovations of the project in the existing system.

M. K. Anwar the honourable minister for agriculture was the chief guest on the occasion while Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir the honourable state minister for agriculture was the special guest. secretary, Ministry of Agriculture chaired the dialogue while Muhammad Jahangir, renowned media personality, was present as the moderator.

Two presentations were made in the dialogue prior to the panel discussion: 'PETRRA technologies, extension, innovations and impact' was presented by Dr. Noel P. Magor, IRRI representative for Bangladesh and PETRRA project manager while 'PETRRA approach and policy overview' was presented by Dr. Mahabub Hossain, head of Social Sciences Division, IRRI Los Banos.

A group of renowned personalities of different professional backgrounds took part in the panel discussion. They were: renowned English daily, the Daily Star Editor, Mahfuz Anam; Professor Golam Rahman of Mass Communication & Journalism Department, DU; Professor Abdul Bayes of Economics Department of Jahangirnagar University (JU); Tariq Hassan, director general, DAE; Dr. M. Mahiul Haque, director general of BIRRI; Dr. A. R. Gomosta, Director-Research of BIRRI and Fazlul Haque Rikabdar, Director, AIS.

Honourable state minister for agriculture, Mr. Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir handed over the pack of communication and extension materials on different PETRRA innovations to the potential GO-NGO extension agents. The agencies receiving the pack of communication and extension materials (tailored for each agency) are listed in Table 1.

A limited number of stalls prepared by respective SPs to display various PETRRA innovations and technologies and methods were installed in the venue.

A plaque and certificate distribution



Table 1. The agencies that received the pack of PETRRA communication and extension materials

Type of agency	Name of agency
Government research and extension agency	Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) for Rice Knowledge Bank, Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) and Rural Development Academy (RDA)
Non-government organisations (NGOs)	BRAC Proshika RDRS HEED Shushilan AAS FIVDB BDS GKF TMSS SAFE IDE AID-Comilla WAVE PROVA MCC APEX CARE ITDG ActionAid
Media	Agricultural Information Service (AIS) Farm Broadcasting, <i>Bangladesh Betar</i> <i>Mati-o-Manush</i> of Bangladesh Television (BTV) <i>Rhidoye Mati-o-Manush</i> of Channel-i <i>Shonali Din</i> of ATN Bangla NTV
Government policy cell	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) working group (Planning Commission)
Donors with relevant projects	European Commission (Food security unit)

ceremony was organised in the afternoon session. This was held as part of the closing celebration to acknowledge the role of the Principal Investigators (PIs) and researchers of the PETRRA SPs for their outstanding contribution to innovations in rice research suitable for the resource-poor farmers of Bangladesh. People from all relevant stakeholders were present in the morning session while the afternoon session was mainly participated by the PIs and research team members.

An attractive and colourful cultural programme was organised in the evening. Cultural teams from different SPs performed popular folk songs on various technologies and innovations targeted to

farmers. *Baul* songs from Kushtia and Alamdanga were also arranged.

All PIs and research team members of PETRRA SPs including BRRI scientists, donor agency representatives, GO-NGO professionals, agriculturists and journalists were present in this closing event.

These events were well covered by the press and electronic media.

Agriculture extension magazine

AIS of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), publishes a monthly agro based Bangla magazine called *Krishikotha* exclusively on agriculture targeted mainly to grass-root level GO-NGO extension



workers and farmers. It has been regularly distributed to the Ministries, policy makers, agriculture professionals, farmers and GO-NGO extension workers at a very minimum cost of Tk. 4 only. PETRRA in collaboration with AIS and with assistance from BIRRI published 35,000 copies of a special edition of *Krishikotha* exclusively on rice to mark the International Year of Rice (IYR) 2004. This rice issue included question and answer for farmers, various write-ups by AIS officers, BIRRI scientists and NGO partners on history and culture of rice and rice-based farming technologies developed mostly by BIRRI and/or by PETRRA SPs that were diverse in nature and suitable for both male and female resource-poor farmers in different parts of the country. In addition to AIS distribution channel, PETRRA distributed this issue to its partner organisations and to grass-root level local NGOs through Proshika, AAS, FIVDB, BDS, Shushilan, BRAC, CDP and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), an NGO working for non-formal education.

Farm Broadcasting on radio

In Bangladesh, only less than 40% of the villages have electricity to run televisions. The Farm Broadcasting Unit of AIS, under the MOA, produces radio programmes that are aired daily from regional centres covering all over the country. It also produces 30-minute magazine programmes on regional topics with jingles and dramas. Time-to-time, Farm Broadcasting aired reports on various PETRRA innovations and activities.

Communication materials for farmers and the extension agents

Bridging the gap between researchers and the farmers or extension workers has always been a big challenge in agriculture. PETRRA always tried to minimise this gap through its communication initiatives. Through a range of participatory planning meetings, workshops, and brainstorming sessions, PETRRA has opted for a range of means/tools for communications.

In February 2004, as part of this effort, PETRRA organised a three-day residential workshop bringing together the scientists, field level extension agents, materials development experts and graphic designers in developing the printed communication materials for its technology SPs. The workshop was aimed at finalising the messages/contents and draft layouts of print materials of its technology development SPs appropriate for farmers and field level extension workers. A primary draft of a total of 17 posters, 18 brochures, 3 booklets, 2 flipcharts and 6 stickers were developed in this workshop. The layouts were displayed along with a comments sheet in the concluding session for the comments of the audience. The appropriate comments were incorporated during the final production.





In March 2004, PETRRA, in collaboration with material and design development experts, developed posters with flow charts using ideas from the process of documentation of uptake methods for each of PETRRA's uptake methods research SPs.

These materials were intended to be used by the semi-literate farmers and grass-root level extension workers in raising community awareness about PETRRA innovations/technologies. These materials were also handed over in a package to the potential GO-NGO extension agents like Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Proshika, DAE, RDRS, GKF and others by the honourable state minister for agriculture at a symbolic distribution ceremony during the closing celebration.

In addition, several of the PETRRA SPs focused specifically on experimentation in communication. These SP outcomes are documented separately (Van Mele et al, 2005). One of these SPs received an international award for the development of seed health videos by village women for village women.

Hard and electronic copies of materials have been archived and are either available on the PETRRA archive website, the PETRRA archive CD-ROM or the Bangladesh Rice Knowledge Bank (BRKB).

In addition, the SPs, on their own initiatives, developed a number of materials to meet the local farmer

demand. Although this material did not go through a quality process, it was an useful experimentation for partners and proved useful for disseminating the innovations.

TV reporting/documentaries on *Rhidoye Mati-o-Manush* of Channel-i

PETRRA collaborated with Channel-i, a private satellite television channel, to disseminate some of its technology SP innovations through its newly launched programme *Rhidoye Mati-o-Manush*. This programme was anchored by the popular TV personality Sykh Seraj who had been involved in a similar type of programme called *Mati-o-Manush* on government-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) for 15 years. The main target audience of *Rhidoye Mati-o-Manush* were primarily the policy makers, GO-NGO managers and extension agents.

PETRRA also opted for quality video recording of its important workshops and seminars for archiving and documentation purposes.

Almost all technology development SPs made documentaries that were shown on BTV, Channel-i or ATN Bangla in their news or in agricultural programmes.

Collaboration with national dailies

PETRRA approached two influential national Bangla and English dailies, the daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star to disseminate its technologies/innovations focusing on agriculture as an engine for



poverty reduction. A meeting was held at the Prothom Alo office with the editor Matiur Rahman, where all aspects of agriculture were discussed from a national perspective.

The Daily Star editor Mahfuz Anam was present as a discussant in the dialogue on 'Agriculture technology and innovations for the poor' at PETRRA closing celebration.

Press and photo releases

Press releases on seminars, workshops, fairs and events were sent out from time-to-time to the national news media. The same were also recycled for posting in the 'news and events' section of the PETRRA and IRRI websites and the PETRRA newsletters. This tool proved useful in disseminating the news of various events like communication fairs, seminars and workshops effectively to a wider audience.

Besides sending press and photo releases PETRRA had close collaboration with a pool of journalists and organisation like FIDA, which covers agriculture in the press and electronic media. They were regularly provided with information on project related activities that focused on rice research with regard to livelihoods change.

Newspaper articles by Professor Bayes

Dr. Abdul Bayes, an eminent economist and a Professor of Jahangirnagar University, wrote a series of articles in The Daily Star and the daily Bhorer Kagoj, two national English and Bangla newspapers respectively from discussions with farmers and various partners of PETRRA SPs in the north-east, north-west and south-west of Bangladesh.

The articles highlighted the following issues:

- Importance of rice in the lives of small

farmers (Seed for survival, The Daily Star, editorial page, June 25, 2003);

- PETRRA's effort to help moderately poor farmers or future poor farmers with cost effective technologies to raise rice output so that they can graduate from present position by using modern varieties (MVs) of rice (As they sow, so they reap, The Daily Star, editorial page, July 1, 2003);
- How some women are engaged at the forefront of the agricultural operations of their households hence being empowered in making household decisions (Tales of the tale-enders, The Daily Star, editorial page, July 8, 2003);
- Participation of the resource-poor female farmers who have been able to increase production per unit of land substantially because of systematic farm practices with new varieties of seeds (The ladies with the lamps, The Daily Star, editorial page, July 17, 2003);
- How two federations of farmers comprised of the landless and marginal farmers have been fighting for the economic emancipation of their members with the technical assistance from PETRRA-RDRS technology uptake SP. Another example of the importance of good training that can play a vital role in improving the production hence uplifting the livelihoods of marginal farm households (What they need is new



knowledge, The Daily Star, editorial page, July 22, 2003);

- Bangladesh's potential in exporting aromatic *bashmati* rice to the international market or at least substitute imports of fine and aromatic rice through domestic production (Research for rich rice, The Daily Star, editorial page, July 30, 2003);
- The importance of infrastructure, innovations and institutions in poverty reduction, especially of resource-poor farmers (The veritable vegetable grower, The Daily Star, editorial page, August 12, 2003);
- The socio-economics and politics of shrimp culture in the south region where the growth of shrimp cultivation should take place under a regime where a) access to common properties are not encroached upon; b) small farmers have the freedom to take home the rewards from shrimp cultivation; c) productivity of agricultural land is not adversely affected; and d) both economic and non-economic costs are duly calculated to point to a sustainable development of the sector (Shrimp culture: deaths or dollars?, The Daily Star, editorial page, September 2, 2003);
- The growing constraints on future rice availability in Bangladesh and the devastatingly developed micronutrient deficiency among the poor households in rural areas (Biotechnology for food security: risks and rewards, The Daily Star, editorial page, September 30, 2003)
- Factors that should be addressed for raising the rate of economic participation of women (Women: changing roles and realising rights, The Daily Star, editorial page, April 27, 2004);
- How healthy seeds could ensure the food security of the poor household in Bangladesh (The ship and the wave, The Daily Star, editorial page, May 14, 2004);

- The innovative ideas that are being undertaken by the PETRRA technology uptake SPs for the resource-poor farmers and the impact of these innovations in their livelihoods (*Dhan Gobeshona o shampad-daridro, ekta bhomon brittanta* [Rice research and resource-poor, a travelogue], the Bhorer Kagoj, editorial page, September 12, 2003);
- The sensitive issue of molecular biology to ensure food and nutrition security for the poor people in Bangladesh (*Krishite biotechnology abong Bangladesh prekbhit* [Biotechnology in agriculture and Bangladesh context], the Bhorer Kagoj, editorial page, October 3, 2003).

These articles have been reproduced separately under this series. Copies are also available on the PETRRA website (petrra.irri.org) or in The Daily Star (www.thedailystar.net) and the Bhorer Kagoj (www.bhorerkagoj.net) archives.

Policy dialogues

Public policy advocacy is the effort to influence public policy through various forms of persuasive communication. Communicating policy research findings through dialogues has proved an effective means of raising awareness of policy makers and research managers on pro-poor policy issues. 'Dynamics of livelihood systems' (DOLSys) SP of PETRRA headed by Dr. Mahabub Hossain of IRRI Social Sciences Division in collaboration with Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised seven issue-related dialogues. These were:

- Rice seed delivery system and seed policy in Bangladesh;
- Rice research and poverty alleviation in Bangladesh;
- Promoting rural non-farm economy of Bangladesh;
- Liberalisation of crop sector: can



Bangladesh withstand regional competition?

- Biotechnology for rice improvement;
- Mapping poverty for rural Bangladesh: implications for pro-poor development; and
- Nature and impact of women's participation in economic activities in rural Bangladesh.

Scientific communication

PETTRA encouraged researchers to publish their results in scientific journals. In addition, research findings have been presented in national and international seminars. PETTRA held two national workshops during its closing for presentations of the findings of technology SPs and uptake methods research.



Bangladesh Rice Knowledge Bank (BRKB)

BRKB coordination group was formed under the leadership of the Director-Research BRRI for the development of communication and training materials for the BRKB. The coordination group included BRRI working scientists and members from two NGOs, RDRS from north-west and AAS from north-east. The main objective under PETTRA was to ensure research findings, for farmers and extension workers from PETTRA SPs, were prepared as simple fact sheets in English and Bangla before the close of the PETTRA project.



Testing on the BRKB primary version CD-ROM was carried out at RDRS Thakurgaon, Rangpur; AAS Sreemangal and at the BRRI Training Division at Gazipur. Participants identified it as a ready reference of rice knowledge-based information.

The BRKB will be continued beyond PETTRA. Contents and training aspects of the BRKB will be managed by BRRI in collaboration with the regional partners who will be working for establishing the BRKB for the benefit of resource-poor farmers. Its aim is to ensure availability of technological innovations online that are relevant for Bangladeshi farmers and extension agents. The main partners involved in the piloting phase of the BRKB were BRRI, RDRS and AAS.

Networks

It would be amiss to not highlight the importance of networks for communication. PETTRA developed networks with potential media groups and associations. CPD, the thinktank civil society body in the field of policy, was one of the partners of PETTRA. Through CPD, research findings were shared with persons concerned with policy. FIDA, an association of agriculture journalists and communication educationists were occasional partners of PETTRA. They helped in the press conferences, seminars and in the coverage



in the news media. Recent collaboration with the satellite TV channel, Channel-i with the two influential national dailies Prothom Alo and The Daily Star can be mentioned. Partners like Proshika, RDRS, FIVDB and AIS have been an important outlet to reach millions of resource-poor farmers. The rice issue of *Krishikotha* was published through AIS and distributed to the grass-root level through Proshika, BRAC, FIVDB, BDS, Campaign for Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and other NGOs in addition to AIS distribution network.

Website

PETRRRA website formed the hub of communication of the PETRRRA project.



Links at this site provided information about the project, its research activities, focal areas, project documents, news, events, SP approval process and other related websites.

CONCLUSION

The demand for impact created a demand for effective communication. SPs have enjoyed developing communication materials that reached beyond their traditional scientific communities to service providers and policy makers. The PETRRRA project PMU would be the first to say there were many gaps in its communication plans etc. but a commitment to action and reflection has provided a learning environment that can be built for future initiatives. We would recommend early attention to communication at the central level and a more thorough development of individual partner skills for this coupled with the development of a good feedback mechanism to improve quality and impact of the communication materials.



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