

Sowing the seeds of prosperity

A seed is agriculture's fundamental element, determining crop yields and the efficiency of all other farming inputs. Biotechnology has produced many improved seed varieties. However, distribution, usually by large-scale seed parastatals, has not met the requirements of small farmers who constitute the vast majority of the farming community in the Asia-Pacific region. To address this problem and formulate measures for a cost-effective seed system, the APO organized a seminar on the Production and Distribution of Improved Seeds for Increasing Agricultural Productivity in India, 5–11 September, in collaboration with the National Productivity Council.

The APO deputed three experts from the Republic of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, all of which have advanced seed production and distribution systems, to exchange views with three local experts and 21 participants. “Opportunities are not given from the outside but have to be created inside by wisdom and effort,” said Dr. Katsumi Katayama, Japan International Cooperation Agency Expert on the Rice Seed Multiplication and Distribution System Improvement project. He gave examples of how Asian countries, including Japan and Indonesia, had developed reliable, effective seed supply chains and listed the three essential components as being regulation to control seed multiplication and distribution of main crops; a National Seed Board to determine details of production plans, processing facility improvement plans, budget/fund allocation, etc.; and a National Seed Board Secretariat.

Participants made two site visits, to the National Seeds Corporation (NSC) and National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR). The NSC is India's first public-sector seed production company, and the NBPGR is a governmental entity with a huge state-of-the-art facility which conserves and maintains germ plasm and identifies exotic pests or diseases for sound plant quarantine measures. “I have observed the facilities at national seed banks in Germany



The NCS conducts stringent seed quality control

and the Netherlands, which are known as being the best; however, the NBPGR was better,” said Head of Division Seed Science and Technology Dr. Satriya Iiyas, Faculty of Agriculture, Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia.

Participants and experts discussed the major issues and concluded that more effort was needed to encourage small farmers to adopt new, improved seeds by means of expanded training, the distribution of mini-kits of new varieties, infrastructure improvement, increased publicity, and public-private partnerships. Active engagement of the public and private sectors was highlighted as crucial. However, governmental support and initiatives are still required as well as crop insurance against natural calamities and epidemic pest outbreaks. 🌀