

INTRODUCTION

This conference on the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), held April 1-4, 2002, was a first attempt to assess cross-nationally the opportunities and limitations that are presented by this remarkable methodology developed in Madagascar for increasing rice production. By raising the factor productivity of land, labor, water and capital, SRI can give yields about twice the present world average without reliance on new varieties or agrochemicals.

A diverse group of participants from 18 countries — NGO workers, researchers, policy-makers, and farmers — gathered in Sanya, China, to share field experience and research findings in four days of reports and group discussions. The conference was organized by:

- **Cornell International Institute for Food, Agriculture and Development** (CIIFAD), which has been facilitating the evaluation and dissemination of SRI since 1994; and
- **China National Hybrid Rice Research and Development Center** (CNHRRDC), which began using SRI methods in 2000 and offered to host the conference.

It was co-sponsored by:

- **Association Tefy Saina** (ATS), the NGO in Madagascar that has pioneered SRI since 1990, carrying on the work of Fr. Henri de Laulanié, S.J., who had developed SRI over the preceding two decades; and
- **China National Rice Research Institute** (CNRRI), which has begun evaluating the methodology this past year.

The conference was supported by a grant to CIIFAD from the Rockefeller Foundation, which enabled the organizers to have wider international participation than otherwise possible.

We were pleased to have 45 international participants — 12 from non-governmental organizations, 11 from universities, 11 from government institutions, 7 from international organizations, 2 from the private sector, and 2 farmers — plus over 50 participants from China. These persons and their institutional affiliations are listed on pages 194-198.

SRI, as elaborated in these proceedings, is a methodology for giving rice plants growing environments that are conducive for more productive phenotypes from existing genotypes. The conference was convened to understand how SRI is being elaborated and modified under diverse conditions between and within countries, responding to different farmer constraints and various objectives.

The conference was expected to consolidate knowledge and clarify practices rather than to describe and evaluate something that is fixed and final. The task was to characterize and assess “a work in progress.”

While SRI is very simple in many respects, it exemplifies the complexity of natural systems, bringing together multiple convergent factors. The concepts of interactivity and synergy are more illuminating for SRI than are any mechanical notions of causation and *ceteris paribus* effects.

The development and spread of SRI has been more practice-led than scientifically derived. This makes all the more necessary an appreciation of the dialectical relationship between knowledge and practice. The meeting was not convened to advocate SRI or to encourage competition for the highest yields. Rather, participants were asked to highlight the problems that they have found with SRI practice and adoption, not to emphasize accomplishments. Only objective, self-critical reporting and evaluation can make SRI more beneficial to large numbers of producers and consumers around the world.

These proceedings make available to persons who could not attend the Sanya conference what was reported there and what ideas and conclusions were generated by group discussions. Since this was a first international conference, the information here is more indicative than conclusive. We hope that this report will heighten others' interest in trying out SRI methods themselves and in contributing to a growing body of scientific explanations as well as to better farmer practices.

The papers have been edited for readability, given that most contributors normally write in some other language than English. We have not tried to homogenize the papers in terms of format or manner of presentation, leaving the differences in tone and style that reflect the diversity of professional and country backgrounds that the varied participants brought to this first international assessment of SRI.

We thank all the members of the international organizing committee whose names are listed on page 193. Special thanks go to Virginia Montopoli, CIIFAD executive assistant, who coordinated the travel and other planning arrangements and assisted at the conference itself. Without her tireless and always helpful support, the event could not have been so successful. We thank also Cally Arthur and Olivia Vent for their skilled assistance in producing these proceedings.

We appreciate very much the support of Dr. Ruben Puentes, Associate Director of the Rockefeller Foundation's Food Security Program. He has not only provided financial assistance for work on SRI but has

been a good professional colleague helping to comprehend the potentials and reasons for SRI success. He was willing to give support and encouragement when there was only a fraction as much evidence to support the claims for SRI as there is now.

This conference has brought together a substantial amount of evidence from around the world that these claims should be taken seriously and evaluated further to understand the limitations and the full potentials of SRI. Both food security and the alleviation of hunger, on the one hand, and the intensification, diversification and modernization of agriculture, on the other, can be supported by this same methodology, which can also have positive impacts on the environment. Further, it appears that SRI could have relevance beyond rice production and for the beneficial agroecological practice of agriculture more generally. Thus we are pleased to share the following information with readers around the world, and we look forward to increasing production and exchange of knowledge about the theory and practice of SRI.

—*The Editors*



Participants at the International Conference on the System of Rice Intensification that was held in Sanya, China on April 1-4, 2002.