

SRP Plenary and General Assembly 2015

Summary and Key Outcomes

Event summary

1. The Sustainable Rice Platform's 5th Annual Plenary Meeting and General Assembly was held in Manila and IRRI's Headquarters at Los Banos, Philippines from 27-29 October 2015. The event incorporated the successful launch of the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation, the world's first rice sustainability standard.
2. Over 120 participants and journalists from Asia and around the world attended the event, officially opened by **Isabelle Louis**, UNEP Deputy Regional Director for Asia-Pacific, and **Dr Matthew Morell**, IRRI Deputy Director-General for Research. Keynote addresses were given by **Dr Calixto Protacio**, Director of PhilRice, Philippines Department of Agriculture, and by **Atty. Analiza Rebuelta-Teh**, Undersecretary and Chief of Staff at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines. Both keynote speakers expressed the alignment and shared commitment of the Philippine Government to SRP's goals and aspirations in regard to food security, livelihoods, climate change impacts and biodiversity.
3. **Wyn Ellis**, SRP Coordinator, introduced the purpose of the meeting and framed the day's discussions. He provided an update on progress achieved since 2014 in terms of growth in membership, funding, collaborative projects, communication/visibility and the finalization of the SRP Standard, Performance Indicators, and supporting tools.
4. Also on Day 1, **Cormac Petit** (Aidenvironment) presented the outcomes of his review of the SRP business model and governance structure. The following discussion led to recommendations and decisions by the Plenary (see 2c, General Assembly Decisions and Recommendations, below).
5. On Day 2, Dr Robert S Zeigler, Director General of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), welcomed delegates to IRRI's headquarters in Los Banos, Philippines. Reinforcing IRRI's commitment to SRP, Dr Zeigler stressed the urgent need for fundraising.
6. Day 2 included a number of thematic breakout groups managed by **Dirk Straathof** (UTZ Certified) covering key topics (**Use of the Standard; Assurance and Communication; and SRP Member Services and Knowledge Tools**) as well as two national roundtables to develop collaborative SRP action plans for Cambodia and Vietnam. Summaries of these discussions are attached as an Annex to this summary.
7. Delegates also had the opportunity to tour IRRI's field experiment site, including the world-famous Long-term Continuous Cropping Experiment (LTCCE). Delegates also met with senior IRRI researchers to discuss the latest advances in breeding, genomics, agronomy and impact acceleration strategies.
8. Day 2 closed with the formal General Assembly session (see details below).
9. Day 3 featured perspectives and video presentations from SRP members and dialogue partners (Loc Troi Group, Oxfam, GIZ, from diverse stakeholder groups, highlighting their interest in, and activities relevant to, the SRP. Two National Round Tables (Cambodia and Vietnam) resulted in national action plans to drive adoption of the SRP Standard and indicators at both farm and policy levels.
10. The event was attended by Jefferson Andrade of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) which provided a global reporting service for the event. All presentation materials are publicly available for download from the SRP website: www.sustainablerice.org

Launch of the SRP Standard and Performance Indicators

11. The world's first sustainability standard for rice, the **SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation**, was launched during the opening session of the Plenary on 27 October. SRP's Chairperson, James Lomax of UNEP, highlighted the potential of the new Standard and associated **SRP Performance Indicators** to drive innovation and change practices both within private sector supply chains and at policy level. The Standard and Indicators are already available in Khmer, and will also be translated into Thai and French as a priority, with other Asian languages to follow.
12. As part of the launch, private and public sector perspectives were offered by Kristin Hughes (Global Director, Nutrition & Wellness and Sustainability, Mars Foods), and Chan Phaloeum (Deputy Director General, General Directorate of Agriculture, Cambodia).
13. A media briefing on the Standard was also held for journalists. Dissemination of a joint UNEP-IRRI media release was coordinated among SRP and the communications / social media teams of UNEP (ROAP and DTIE), IRRI, Mars Foods and UTZ Certified.
14. Coinciding with the launch of the Standard, Mars Foods announced a global corporate commitment to 100% sourcing of its rice by 2020, using the Standard as a basis for monitoring corporate compliance. Media monitoring reported the event was widely reported globally on at least 138 news and specialist sites; over the subsequent week the whole team worked in concert to respond to numerous media inquiries. The FAQs originally prepared have already been updated to reflect new questions from the media, and are now available at the SRP website.
15. Coinciding with the launch, Mars Foods announced a corporate commitment to 100% sustainable sourcing of rice by 2020. Following the company's initial on-farm tests in Pakistan and India, the Standard, Indicators and SRP's automated Data Collection Tool is to be adopted among farmers supplying Mars Foods.
16. In Cambodia, Mrs Chan Phaloeum, Deputy Director General of Cambodia's General Directorate of Agriculture, announced that Cambodia would incorporate the SRP Standard into national policy following the field work. Policy-level adoption will be contingent upon the outcomes of the farm level validation and benchmarking.

General Assembly decisions and recommendations

1. During the formal General Assembly (GA) session on Day 3, members were asked to take decisions on recommendations from the SRP Advisory Committee on 4 resolutions:
 - a. Approval of new SRP members
 - b. Election of officers to the 2015-2017 Advisory Committee (2 seats)
 - c. Endorsement of Advisory Committee recommendations from the SRP Review
 - d. Endorsement of SRP Action Plan / Budget 2015-2016
2. The resolutions were endorsed by the GA as follows:
 - a. **New members:** memberships of 4 new SRP members (**Loc Troi Group, Syngenta, Wildlife Conservation Society and Vredeseilanden-VECO**) were endorsed by the GA. The Plenary also noted that **Dow Agrosciences, the Department of Agriculture of the Philippines (possibly through PhilRice), the National Food Authority and the National Food Development Center** (also Philippines Government agencies) have confirmed their interest to join SRP.

It was additionally agreed that membership invoices are to be raised in January of each year for settlement within 90 days; members were reminded to expedite payment of outstanding dues.

- b. **Election of Advisory Committee officers:** With the end of the term of office of **Rajeev Raina (Olam International)**, and a vacancy for the NGO/research/international agency seat, two positions in the Advisory Committee became available. To fill these seats, two new officers were elected by the GA: **Paul Nicholson (Global Sustainability and Risk Manager, Olam International)** and **Peter Sprang, Regional Representative, Vredeseilanden/VECO-Indonesia**).

Having been instrumental in shaping SRP's development from the outset, **Dr Bas Bouman** announced that he is now stepping down as IRRI's representative to the SRP Advisory Committee and SRP Co-chair. SRP will always be indebted to Bas for his commitment and untiring efforts to steer the SRP to the point where we are today poised for significant growth. He will be greatly missed as a respected Co-chair and member of the Advisory Committee; nevertheless we are delighted that he will remain involved in his capacity as Director of GRISP.

The GA warmly welcomed **Dr Bruce Tolentino (Deputy DG for Communications and Partnerships)** as IRRI's incoming representative on the Advisory Committee and SRP Co-Chair.

- c. **Recommendations from the SRP Review:** The following actions were agreed by the GA:
- Building on the preliminary review by **Cormac Petit (Aidenvironment)**, conduct a more detailed review of SRP's vision and ambition, define priorities and make initial choices on business model and governance structure, with a view towards clarifying the value proposition of SRP for stakeholders. This will include a feasibility study of the strategy.
 - Conduct a detailed review of the SRP governance structure, to align with revised priorities and business model options. This will include a review of the TORs and composition of the Advisory Committee and Secretariat to ensure accountability, flexibility and good governance. It was proposed that the review should also include consideration of the possibilities for (a) a 'third party' chair for the AC; and (b) organizational options for SRP, including establishment of an independent legal entity, funding model and member dues structure. The proposal was discussed and taken under advisement, to be revisited at AC level.
- d. **SRP Action Plan and Budget for 2015-16:** The proposal as presented was endorsed as recommended by the Advisory Committee, with the following priorities agreed:
- Development of a professional fundraising strategy.** The AC proposed to form a Communication Working Group, to be chaired by Kristin Hughes of Mars Foods. The Group's first task will be to develop TORs for a communication consultant at the SRP Secretariat (see below), whose role will be to assist the AC in developing the SRP's communication strategy, organizational brand identity, messaging and fundraising strategy. The desirability for a face-to-face SRP visioning meeting (possibly early 2016) will be explored to speed progress towards a communications and fund-raising strategy.
 - Communication strategy:** Development of an effective communications strategy vis-à-vis members and external stakeholders.
 - Elaboration of a mid-term SRP development strategy,** restate vision and mission, determine SRP's role in its realization, determine priorities and make initial choices on business model and governance structure, with a view towards clarifying the value proposition of SRP for stakeholders. This includes a feasibility study of the strategy.
 - Standard field implementation:** Validation of the SRP Standard and indicators v. 1.0 through a coordinated programme of member-led field-testing activities, synthesis of the

results, and member and external consultation leading to a revised version of the Standard and Indicators.

- **Development of a verification and communication model** on use of the Standard and Indicators by companies and governments based upon potential member needs.
 - **Farmer outreach:** Collection/ development of farmer outreach materials to facilitate promotion of the standard among farmers.
 - **Secretariat capacity:** To carry out and support the above activities, the GA approved the expansion of the Secretariat – fully funded by the SRP (membership fees and other income) – with the hire of a full time **Technical Coordinator** (to lead the validation and revision of the Standard and Indicators) and a **Communication Consultant**. Including the existing employment of the **SRP Coordinator**, the Secretariat will grow to 3 full-time staff in 2016.
 - IRRI offered – and the Plenary endorsed - to host the Technical Coordinator at its headquarters in Los Banos, Philippines, in order to facilitate access to technical expertise and leverage IRRIs' convening power in the rice sector. IRRI also offered to co-finance the salary cost for the first year, provided the Advisory Committee could guarantee continuity for a 3-year period. The AC provided this guarantee. The GA also stressed the importance of prioritizing continuity of employment of the SRP Coordinator, and of the (to-be appointed) Technical Coordinator, whether through UNEP, IRRI or a third party. With respect to the Communications Consultant, it was decided to wait for the recommendation of the Communication Working Group to set Terms of Reference, and to advise which SRP member should host the position.
3. Finally, the GA commended **Wyn Ellis** for his outstanding work as SRP Coordinator over the past year, in raising the profile of the SRP, expanding its membership base, and coordinating its many activities.
 4. All conference materials and a conference report have been posted to the SRP's public site. IISD joined the event to provide a global reporting service to the wider stakeholder community. IISD's report will also be posted to the site in due course.

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Annex**Plenary Breakout Group / National Round Table Summaries****1. Use of the Standard**

The twofold purpose of the standard was emphasized: (a) improvement (gap analysis, training and monitoring); and (2) compliance (verification and permissible claims). The Performance Indicators form a key role in complementing the Standard by measuring changes resulting from on-farm adoption of sustainable best practice through (1) assessing level of compliance with the Standard; and (2) awareness campaigns, training and policy changes.

The complementarity of the two routes to adoption (public and private sector-driven) was also stressed.

The group agreed that the SRP Standard needs to be “translated” into best farming practices and support measures.

Finally, the group recommended that the SRP should not rely on incentivization through market pull (i.e. price premium) for sustainable rice. This market pull can act as a catalyst, but not as a structural incentive to drive wide-scale adoption.

2. Assurance and Communication

The group focused on three key requirements: flexible assurance systems, definitions and communication tools.

Assurance: there is a need to tailor assurance schemes to diverse needs at country and system level, while still upholding the SRP Standard. However, it will be important to ensure assurance schemes are aligned to allow flexibility while also ensuring that this flexibility does not create a “race to the bottom”. At the same time, we must be prepared for the other 95%; what’s in it for the farmers?

Definitions: SRP needs to align on a few key definitions for engagement with stakeholders, including the government, particularly in regard to Sustainable Sourcing, farm-level sustainability, and assurances/claims (e.g. “working toward sustainable cultivation”).

Communication: it will be important to consider the range of tools SRP will need for engagement, and develop core messages with a common interpretation and common approach for engaging farmers. SRP members also need to agree on an aligned approach for approaching governments, to establish common goals, leverage government engagement in policy and outreach, and manage expectations for each defined target group.

3. SRP member services and knowledge tools

A breakout session on SRP member services and knowledge tools was held to explore member perspectives on potential roles for SRP. The following recommendations were offered.

1. The SRP network is a strong and influential platform for communication among diverse stakeholders. This should be further reinforced by enhancing connectivity to international markets and new business partners, especially among farmer and consumer groups, governments and the retail sector. SRP members need to serve as ‘ambassadors’ in order to raise SRP’s visibility and build recognition/credibility within the broader stakeholder community.

2. SRP should develop a market strategy to connect sustainable rice to markets. This would involve creation of an SRP certification scheme that would allow branding of products under an SRP label. This should be supported with an awareness-raising communication strategy that explicitly defines the value of SRP certification to both farmers and consumers. There should also be a guide to benchmark SRP vs existing standards such as VietGAP, GlobalGAP and establish linkages with national governments.
3. Standard adoption (1): SRP needs to articulate the Standard's key messages and provide a clear statement of the business case for rice farmers: What is the added value: cost reduction, efficiency, yield, premium, etc.?
4. Standard adoption (2): a practical guide to implementation by farmers is needed as part of a farmer communication/outreach strategy.
5. Pilot studies: SRP should offer site visits for members who are not directly involved in implementation. A robust data management system is needed to provide a geographical overview and facilitate analysis. Pilot results, lessons learned and success stories must be shared with the membership.
6. SRP operation and management: SRP has potential as a powerful influencer, and its leverage will grow further with an increasing membership base. However, to accomplish this will require significantly increased capacity, together with clarity about the roles of different stakeholders. The website could be important as a portal, and the Members' Area offers important benefits for members in terms of exclusive access to information. This could be expanded to facilitate exchange of information and discussion among members, e.g. through COPs, chat facility.

4. Cambodia National Round Table

Following on from the Cambodia SRP Launch on 8-9 October in Phnom Penh, the following key stakeholders were identified to implement a national SRP action plan for Cambodia:

- Government: General Directorate of Agriculture: Department of Rice Crop and Department of Agricultural Cooperatives
- NGOs: Oxfam, WCS, Srei Khmer, Rachana
- Research / international agencies: IRRI, GIZ. International Finance Corporation
- Private Sector: Cambodian Rice Federation, VECO, Mars Foods, Amru Rice, Golden Rice and Van Sillevoldt Rijst
- Agricultural cooperatives (AC) and farmers.

An action plan was proposed to adopt a variety of outreach models, i.e. working with farmer groups via local NGOs and companies; and contract farming with individual farmers and agricultural cooperatives via companies. The proposed activities are as follows:

1. Test SRP in 2 key ecosystems (Oxfam, Wildlife Conservation Society, Amru Rice Co. and Golden Rice Co.)
 - Organize meetings with stakeholders to prepare the training manual and design the field test and data collection form as well as training curriculum.
 - Conduct training for agricultural officers and target farmers on SRP.

- Carry out the field test: Oxfam potentially in Takeo and Pust Province with SRI farmers, WCS in Prah Vihea and Kampong Thom province, AMRU Rice Co. and Golden Rice Co. (Target provinces to be confirmed).
- 2. GIZ is currently assessing whether the Better Rice Initiative Asia www.better-rice-initiative-asia.org could be scaled-up to Cambodia, linking up with SRP.
- 3. Engage in dialogue with FAO to explore areas of collaboration for the validation of standards under the umbrella of FAO-supported National IPM Programme.
- 4. Organize private sector events to introduce the SRP standard in 2016 and 2017 (IFC).
- 5. Conduct 2 meetings per season to update the outputs of field tests, as well as a seasonal evaluation and planning meeting every end of the season, and an annual workshop to present the findings of the field tests, update the annual workplan, and provide inputs for revision of the SRP Standard.
- 6. Incorporate the SRP Standard and indicators in the next update of the National Rice Policy (through CARD).
- 7. Develop a concept note for implementing the above activities and submit to SRP Secretariat for endorsement and help in fundraising.

5. Viet Nam National Round Table

1. SRP orientation in Viet Nam is supported by private partners, Loc Troi and Syngenta and by IFC. Loc Troi has a strong footprint in the rice value chain, ranging from farm inputs to marketing of produce in Viet Nam and internationally. It has 17,000 contract rice farmers and 1,300 extension agents working in the Mekong Delta, and 5 mills with an annual milling capacity of 1 million tonnes.
2. Loc Troi plans to roll out implementation of the Standard as basis to build awareness and engagement of with key stakeholders to scale up adoption. By its own assessment, Loc Troi's production system is likely to satisfy the majority of SRP Standard criteria. Hence this offers a platform to enhance and scale up adoption.
3. A further consideration is how to certify compliance with the SRP Standard, as part of building commercial brand equity. This could help to accelerate adoption alongside longer term benefits of sustainability and social responsibility. The concept of Participatory Guarantee Schemes (PGS) was discussed as an alternative to full 3rd party certification. VECO-Viet Nam has expertise in PGS in vegetables, and will explore its potential in rice.
4. Loc Troi defined the detailed pilot program. Loc Troi will define the detailed pilot programme with support from SRP, IFC and IRRI. The costs of IRRI's technical assistance inputs will be funded by SRP.
5. A pre-season visit to Loc Troi (Mekong Delta) will be made from 6-11 December by Joel Janiya and Estela Pasuquin of IRRI, followed by a kick-off workshop to be organized in HCMC soon thereafter. This workshop will define the scale and scope of field implementation activities. Implementation of pilot will begin by end of 2015.
6. The Government of Viet Nam supports the initiative and stands ready to incorporate the principles of the SRP Standard into its own programmes, contingent upon demonstrable benefits during the validation phase.

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