



NEWS RELEASE

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Development experts gather to debate promise of water saving rice

Feb 24. Anand, Gujarat. New findings from IWMI -Tata researchers and collaborators in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh - have revealed that a unique method of rice production known as 'the System of Rice Intensification'(SRI) could increase rice yields in parts of India by 25-100 percent and at the same time reduce water use by 25 - 50 percent or more.

India uses around 350 billion m³ of water to grow rice and researchers claim that large-scale propagation of SRI technology may help reduce pressure on the country's scarce water resources, especially in peninsular India and in north-western states of Punjab and Haryana.

"SRI could make a very significant contribution to India's future food security and deliver real benefits to poor farmers", explains Dr. Tushaar Shah, who heads the IWMI – Tata Water Policy Program. "Already tens of thousands farmers in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have adopted SRI with spectacular results".

SRI was first pioneered in Madagascar, and has been successfully field tested in over 20 countries. It involves a range of different cultivation practises. 8-12 day old rice saplings are carefully transplanted at least 25 cm apart in a square pattern. Alternate wetting and drying is practiced during the formative growth phase of the plant and manure is used in place of chemical fertilizers.

Professor Norman Uphoff of Cornell University will lead the discussion on SRI at the annual IWMI-Tata Partners Meeting taking place in Anand from 24 -26 February. The theme of this year's meeting is: "India's Water Economy: Bracing up for a Turbulent Future". Over 200 water experts including researchers, development professionals, NGOs and international organizations will come together to present and debate the latest research findings aimed at tackling India's water problems. Substantial participation from central and state governments will be the hallmark of this year's event.

Other issues to be covered at the meeting include the latest research on the rapidly expanding culture fishery sector in many parts of India which has opened up new possibilities for income generation and nutrition improvement especially for poorer households in rural areas. The size of India's pond fishery economy has grown spectacularly from a few hundred crore rupees in 1970's to Rs 7000 crore today. It is an economy that is growing at 20-25 percent/year. Getting its benefits to poor people requires astute policy action from governments.

The three-day event will include 12 workshops and discuss around 100 research papers prepared by IWMI-Tata researchers and a number of other collaborators. One of the highlights is expected to be new discussions around water management issues in eastern and western Himalayas, covering Jammu and Kashmir, Uttaranchal and the seven sisters in North East India.

Planning Commission member BN Yugandhar will lead the discussions on Integrated Watershed Development Program. Outstanding cases of NGO watershed programs in India, such as Maharashtra's Indo-German Watershed Program, Karnataka's Mayrada, Orissa's Agragami, BAIF's *vadi* program and the Sadguru Foundation's work in tribal regions will be discussed.

Dr John Briscoe, Asia Water Advisor of the World Bank will deliver the inaugural address. The World Bank lending for water sector in India is slated to increase 3-4 times from the current level of US \$ 800 million/year. Mr Briscoe will outline the Bank strategy for support to central and state government projects in water sector.

The IWMI-Tata Program, Pravah and the Ahmedabad based Centre for Development Alternatives have been operating a Citizens' Monitoring System to monitor the progress of the Narmada drinking water pipeline project. The Conference will discuss the results of the system. Over 80% of the 1287 villages covered by the scheme were found to be receiving Narmada water. In these villages, over 80% of the households now have access to Narmada water.

The IWMI-Tata Water Policy Research Program was established in Anand in 2000 through a partnership between International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Colombo and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Mumbai. The Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation, New Delhi is likely to join as the third partner in phase two of the Program.

Notes for Editors:

1. Further details on the IWMI – Tata annual partners meeting can be found at <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/iwmi-tata/Index.asp>